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THE NINETEEN HUNDREDS

THE NINETEEN HUNDREDS

BY

HORACE WYNDHAM

("The Man in the Mask")

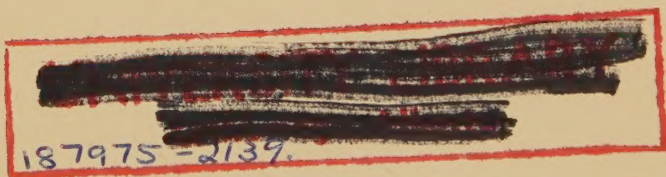


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I have an hour's talk in store for you.

JULIUS CÆSAR.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

It seems to be the general custom of present-day writers to preface their books with an explicit assurance that "all the characters and incidents in the following pages are entirely imaginary."

In this book, however, none of the characters and none of the incidents are in any degree imaginary.

PUBLISHER'S NOTE

In England the authorship of this book was veiled under a pseudonym, Reginald Auberon, which is the title of one of Mr. Wyndham's novels.

Since the appearance of the English edition, the deaths have occurred of Viscount Northcliffe, Sir Leslie Ward, and Mr. Rutland Barrington, to each of whom reference is made in certain of the following chapters.

February, 1923.

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CHAPTER I

MEMOIRS FOR ALL

Heredity in Authorship—"Complete Letter Writer"—Out-of-Print
Volume—Autobiographical Output—Memoirs for All—Errors
and Omissions.

1.

THERE are several approved ways of beginning a volume of reminiscences. I have even come across one which started off in this somewhat unconventional, not to say bizarre, fashion:—

"January the First, the Year of Our Lord, 1784, Walking this Evening in New Oxford Street, was Accosted by a Fair Impure"!

A bright and dramatic opening, I admit. Still, scarcely an example to be adopted in a book like the following, which, after all, is primarily intended for family reading.

The compiling of reminiscences obviously runs in my family, for the autobiographical volume from which the above pithy extract is made was written by my own great-grandfather. He was then a youth

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of two-and-twenty, and had just been ordained. The *Dictionary of National Biography* says a good deal about his career (he finished up in the gaiters of a dean), but is dumb about his early attempts at authorship. Perhaps this is just as well.

It is now a fair number of years since I came across this initial effort. I was a very small boy at the time (as a matter of fact, still on the sunny side of ten), and was browsing among the books in the library of my father, who was also a clergyman. The volume thus enshrining the life story of his own grandfather was in manuscript form. I was not, however, permitted more than a single swift and wondering glance at its yellowing pages, when parental authority snatched it from me, and I have never seen it since.

One of these fine days I must go to the British Museum to see if there is a copy in the "Rare and Valuable MS. Department."

My father had quite a remarkable library for a country rector; and as a small boy I was very fond of exploring it. Looking back on this period, I am not altogether surprised that freedom of access to its shelves was forbidden me, except under close supervision. This is because, in addition to the justly celebrated "reminiscences" of my revered ancestor, it contained another volume not entirely suited to juvenile reading. Like the former, it was, I understand, also written by a member of my family. This one, however, had advanced beyond manuscript form and achieved the distinction of being actually printed.

Memoirs for All

The truly remarkable work to which I am now referring was obviously intended as a contribution to education, and was published somewhere about the year 1840. The title, after the fashion of the period, was a little cumbersome—viz: *A Treatise on the Epistolary Art, being a Complete Guide to Polite Letter Writing for Persons in Every Rank and Station, with Numerous Examples Selected and Arranged by a Member of the Aristocracy.*

I don't like to think of any of my departed ancestors as wilful deceivers, but my inherent love of candour compels me to remark that for this one to dub himself a "member of the aristocracy" was pure camouflage. He had no more right to such a designation than I have. As a matter of fact, he was a member of the Indian Civil Service (or "John Company," as it was called in those distant days) and had just retired.

The *Complete Guide* was certainly marked by thoroughness. Nothing slipshod about it; and no conceivable circumstances under which the purchaser could want to write a letter seemed to be missed. Thus, there were approved specimens for the use of a "Young Gentleman of no Fortune Aspiring to the Hand of a Wealthy Heiress;" for a "Person in Indigent Circumstances applying for Financial Help;" for a "Merchant complaining of the Quality of Goods Supplied;" for "Accepting an Invitation to a Rout;" for "Declining Ditto"; and for "Recommending a Friend to the Consideration of Another," etc., etc., together with a series of valuable tips on

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"How to Stave off Applicants for Loans (without Hurting Feelings of Same)," and the "Correct Manner of Addressing the Nobility." Something for everyone.

As I turned over the pages idly I suddenly lit upon this piece of first aid to the inexperienced:—"Form of Letter from a Girl of the Town seeking Admission to a Home for Penitent Prostitutes." I was no critic; but, young as I was, it struck even my limited comprehension as an admirable piece of work, although perhaps running somewhat to length. Thus, the supposititious applicant, who found herself in the unfortunate situation described, started off by explaining that "under promise of honourable wedlock," she "had fallen a victim to the overtures of a licentious soldier;" but that, "having reaped the inevitable consequences of illicit passion," she "was now most earnestly resolved to turn over a fresh leaf;" and, in short, considered herself "fully qualified to be admitted to the Home."

Altogether, a model specimen of the "epistolary art," prefaced by a well-selected quotation from Mrs. Elizabeth Fry, and finishing up with an appropriate text from the New Testament. It certainly ought to have done the trick if anything could.

But before I was able to put any enquiries on the subject parental hands reached out, and I saw the work consigned to a carefully locked cupboard.

For years past Messrs. Sotheran have had a standing order to secure me a copy.

Memoirs for All

2.

A casual examination of the publishers' lists, book advertisements and catalogues of second-hand dealers gives me the distinct impression that this is by no means the first volume of reminiscences that has appeared. Nor from what I know of authors and would-be authors, is it at all likely to be the last.

This is as it should be. With regard to such forms of literary activity, indeed, I am in full agreement with the opinion on the subject advanced by one of the small fry of the mid-Victorian era. He had written his autobiography, and when asked by a hypercritical reviewer why he had done so, boldly replied, "Everybody ought to write his recollections." The passage embodying this view is so well expressed that I am going to fill up half a page by quoting it:—

"If (rightly or wrongly) he thinks his recollections to be of any particular value, this duty is of course clear; if, in his own opinion, they are of little or none, his neglect of it is not excused by a self-estimate which may well be but indolence in disguise. He must not be put off even by the sincerest conviction that he is a Nobody. He must not say to himself, 'who am I that my memories should possess the faintest interest for any fellow creature, man, woman, or child?' Even though he be actually a Nobody, then he is all the more likely to reflect the period to which he belongs. The interest attaching

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to the Somebodies of a period, its makers and its influences, is personal to themselves; and for *that* we have all we need in the way of history, biography, correspondence, recollection, and criticism; and often, in the case of the men and women who have 'caught on,' much more than we need."

"To reflect the period to which he belongs." This is the real value of any reminiscences worth a pot of ink and a pad of paper—not to mention the wear-and-tear of a printing press. And, after all, who can achieve this result better than the small fry, the "Nobodies"? The minnows, and not the tritons, are emphatically in the vast majority of any imaginable period; and it is they who are really representative of it.

No doubt this contention will come as a horrible heresy and a severe shock to the system to all the hectic host of obscure peers and peeresses, advertising actors and actresses, wives of Cabinet ministers, pushful politicians, soldiers and sailors who have become *dégommé*, leading co-respondents, cinema "stars," prize-fighters, second-rate editors, third-rate journalists, pseudo authors, and super-profiteers and O.B.E's, etc., who labour under the remarkable impression that they are the only people who count in this sorry scheme of things entire. It is always an ungraceful task to dispel illusions, but there are times when there is nothing else for it. This is one of them.

Memoirs for All

3.

To my mind the average autobiographer commits two cardinal and endemic errors in his onslaught on the reading public. The first is that he puts off writing at all until it is much too late in the day, with the inevitable result that his reminiscences and opinions have then entirely lost any point that they ever possessed. The dogmatic and hasty views of a young man (or woman) are, I admit, not nearly so valuable as the tempered and considered judgments of his (or her) elders and betters. There is, however, no getting away from the fact that they are—nine and a-half times out of ten—ininitely more entertaining.

The second cardinal and characteristic error of the average autobiographical volume is that its aim always seems to be to impress the reader with the fact that the writer has never moved in any but what are snobbishly termed the “upper” circles. To this end, accordingly, we get little but long lists of the dukes and duchesses, tailing off to the Sir Somebody this and the Lady that, with whom the industrious compiler has sedulously scraped acquaintance. Anybody under the status of at least a City knight or an O.B.E. stands a poor chance of being even mentioned, except perhaps as a mere also-ran, and then probably only in a furtive footnote. This is a mistake, for apart from its deplorable snobbishness, such a book loses the appeal it would otherwise make. After all, nothing is gained by this vulgarity, for

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library subscribers as a class are not so silly as to believe that the authors of these fulsome works were really on intimate (or any other) terms with half the supposititiously illustrious personages appearing in their pages. The stranded gentry are much more interesting than the landed ones; also, they are a great deal more human.

Perhaps it would be as well if I were now to utter a word of friendly counsel. This is that if, after what I have just said, anybody expects to find constant references in the following chapters to people whose names figure in at any rate the peerage and similar works, he (or she) will be disappointed. The fact is, I don't know any of the nobility intimately enough to write about them. I have, however (and just to show that I do move in good society), been on nodding terms with the sons of two peers. One of them had been in a lunatic asylum; and the other one ought to have been.

I give you fair warning. This book is all about Nobodies, and is written by one of them.

CHAPTER II

LONDON IN NINETEEN HUNDRED

London in Nineteen Hundred—Then and Now—Notable Gaps—Tights Banned at the Reform—Higher Life for Lower Orders—Toynbee Hall Eclecticism—Contretemps at Concert.

1.

THE person who wields a pen has a certain unique and valuable prerogative. He is something of a magician. Thus, he has only to say "time passed," and, to all intents and purposes, it has passed—and just as much (or as little) of it as he pleases. I will accordingly here avail myself of this prerogative, and jump fifteen years ahead at one swoop. The gap thus bridged brings me to London, and a suitable starting-off place for the pages that follow.

When I arrived in London it was in the early Nineteen Hundreds. They were the very early Nineteen Hundreds indeed, being, as a matter of fact, the first twelve months of that decade. Still, I can none the less claim to have known and seen something of London life at the beginning of this century.

Looking back on it now through the mists of more than a score of years, the London that I first knew

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was very different from the one that has succeeded it. Although I have no sort of respect for antiquity *qua* antiquity, I really think it was a better London. Certainly it was a much pleasanter one. Things were not so hectic then. Life flowed more easily, and a young man like myself with neither friends nor money nor prospects that amounted to a row of pins, had on the whole a better time of it than he could in these strenuous days. The weakest went to the wall, certainly, then, as now. Yet people, taking them all round, were brighter and cheerier, readier to help and less greedy and envious; and the vulgar slogan "get on, or get out," was still waiting to be acclaimed (even by its proud progenitor) a gem of purest ray serene. Money wasn't everything; and, since super-profiters had not been invented, it also went a good deal further. Thus, Savile Row's top price for a properly cut suit was seven pounds; and whiskey good enough for any one to drink was four-and-six-pence a bottle. Yesterday I saw plastered on the windows of an advertising vulgarian in the Strand the announcement, "Our Gents' Indigo Lounge Suitings are now Only Ten Guineas"; and a rascal in the hinterland of Oxford Street had the effrontery to demand fifteen shillings for an unpleasant-looking mixture of bilge water and potato spirit, unblushingly labelled "more than 30 degrees under proof." I was not surprised to see a second inscription, "Very Curious."

London in Nineteen Hundred! A circumscribed—not to say, parochial London, on which to look back

London in Nineteen Hundred

in these hustling Nineteen Twenties. No flag-days, no taxis, no tubes, no motor-buses. The Westminster Aquarium on its last legs; half the present theatres not yet built; and the crimped-haired young actor-managers of to-day "walking-on," or carrying banners in suburban pantomimes. Irving's star was setting (the Lyceum, indeed, was practically bankrupt); Mrs. Langtry, Mrs. Patrick Campbell, Ellen Terry, Charles Wyndham, George Alexander, Beerbohm Tree, and Cyril Maude etc., all more than twenty years younger and more than twenty per cent better. Forbes-Robertson and Martin Harvey slowly making their way, and Arthur Bouchier and H. B. Irving looked upon as a couple of promising amateurs deserving of encouragement when they had acquired a little more experience. And the typical fare offered to playgoers:—creased trousers and frock coats at the St. James's; stage carpenter stuff at His (then Her) Majesty's; talk and tea cups at the Criterion; Seymour Hicks (prancing and perspiring) at the old Gaiety; and William Terriss bellowing fustian (and with an almost convincing air of believing it) at the Adelphi.

Well, theatrically at any rate, we have certainly advanced a step.

London at the start of the Nineteen Hundreds! Think for a moment what this means. Only people now qualified to be great-grandfathers had ever seen a coronation; solicitors and shopwalkers still wore side whiskers and frock coats; actor-managers recruited their companies largely in pubs; music-hall

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comedians had red noses and sang songs about lodgers and kippers; "slapstick" humour was the only brand that "went down"; members of beauty choruses (or what passed for them) wore weird garments called "tights" (or technically, "trunks"); Henry Irving and Arthur Roberts were the admitted heads of the stage world in their respective spheres; newspapers printed long-winded leaders in approved Telegraphese; journalists took shorthand notes on their detachable cuffs, and deferentially touched their hats to proprietors in sheer gratitude at getting as much as three pounds a week; the "Yellow Book" (with Henry Harland at the helm) was considered "fearfully French"; and the "Gay Lord Quex" was regarded as dreadfully daring by unsophisticated playgoers who had not yet realized that strumpets and brothels were shortly to become familiar features of the output of all our leading dramatists; a young author, known as H. G. Wells, was beginning to knock at publishers' doors with some success; Arnold Bennett was busy turning out descriptive articles on camisoles in a woman's paper (which he was also editing); and G. K. Chesterton was still waiting on the mat outside dingy Fleet Street offices; nobody (thanks to the pudding-brained people who steadily refused him a hearing) had ever heard of Somerset Maugham; the sixpenny weeklies, with their photographs of half-naked actresses and quite naked babies, had not yet discovered that they could just as easily get a shilling for a worse production; a motor trip was an adventure; aeroplanes were still in the

London in Nineteen Hundred

womb of Time; the gramophone was still but a wheezing toy; the cinema had not been invented; the rumbling clash and clamour of a parochial struggle (all things are comparative) like the Boer War had already become dimmed; nobody got a dole; dukes had not begun to see Bolshevism lurking below stairs; sycophancy and lip-service ruled broadcast; and the average individual bellowed lustily (at the bidding of a disciplined clergy whom the bishops were still able to control) "God bless the Squire and his Relations, and keep us in our Proper Stations," or words to that effect.

Altogether, a London that would be unrecognizable nowadays.

2.

A considerable number of people who loomed large in the Stage world of that somewhat distant period no longer figure in it. Some have died, and gone wherever it is that theatrical folk go; and others have dropped out of the running, or at any rate disappeared. Of these the most important (in public estimation) were Alexander, Tree, and Charles Wyndham, all of whom died quite recently and within a few months of one another, preceded by Irving and Lewis Waller. Terriss came to a tragic end outside his own stage door; and three admirable comedians (but of whom the present generation has probably never heard) in Willie Edouin, James Welch, and Edmund Payne, have left the limelight for ever. Henry Dana, so long Tree's loyal lieutenant-

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ant (and the man to whom he owed so much of his box-office success) did not survive him long. Then the war finished George Edwardes, who, whilst taking his annual "cure" at Nauheim, had the ill luck to be engulfed in the mad maelstrom that swept across the world in 1914. John Hollingshead, his predecessor at the Gaiety, was gathered to his fathers soon after I came to London. I remember him as a decrepit old man, eking out a precarious livelihood by writing a weekly column of nonsense in a second-rate Manchester paper. Yet he was possessed of more than average literary ability, and had been a protégé of Dickens.

"It's only a couple of guineas a week," he said to me, "but it helps to keep the pot boiling."

It was a little pathetic to think of Hollingshead, before whom, in the days of his Gaiety consulship, half theatrical London used to grovel, being driven by force of circumstance to spend his old age in this sort of ill-paid drudgery. In his time he had given fat and underbred actors and actresses thousands upon thousands of pounds. Yet when it was suggested that they should do something in return they could only mumble, "poor old buffer, he's a has-been."

Hollingshead was as unlike the average retired theatrical manager of his period—especially of such a place as the Gaiety—as it would be possible to conceive. Thus he was neither blustering, nor truculent, nor tippling. He never smacked strangers on the back, called them "dear boy," attempted to

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borrow a sovereign on the strength of five minutes' acquaintance, or suggested "coming round the corner to 'ave one." On the contrary, I rather fancy he was a teetotaler. Certainly, he was always well bred and courtly; and with his dignified air, fresh complexion, and scrupulously neat clothes he looked more like a country squire than anything else. Charles Morton, whom I also knew in his extreme old age when he was nominally managing the Palace music hall (but really playing second fiddle to a spruce young fellow called Butt, who has since received the accolade and blossomed into Sir Alfred) was, except for his venerable white whiskers, of a somewhat similar appearance. He had started his long career as a potman or waiter, and ended it looking like a respectable solicitor or a family butler. I have never seen any great difference between the two.

Like a good many people, John Hollingshead had a grievance. His was, so he once confided to me, that he had been blackballed by the Reform Club. Heaven alone knows why he wanted to join, but he did want. It seems, however, that when, after being duly proposed and seconded, he put up for membership, somebody wrote to the committee lodging an objection on the grounds that "his business was the public exhibition of young women in tights." This was true enough. What, however, was equally true was that the stern moralist who would not have him in the club was an individual who manufactured wholesale the offending garments which Hollings-

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head purchased from him in the ordinary course of business. Although this was pointed out to them, the committee, unable to see an inch beyond their noses, did the gnat-straining act and declined his candidature.

Still, I don't think "Practical John" (as, although a most unpractical person really, he was always called) cared as much as he pretended. It provided him with a genuine grievance, and he would have been miserable without one.

3.

The expense of Life in London is infinitely higher now than it was twenty years ago. Take, to begin with, the matter of accommodation. When I first arrived on the scene my quite comfortable and well furnished lodgings absorbed only 8s. 6d. a week, and the bill for my plain but ample board was in the same modest proportion.

Of course, this sounds incredible. It is, however, really nothing of the kind. The explanation is that I merely had a bed-sitting room, and the address was Whitechapel. To go still further into purely domestic details, I lived at Toynbee Hall, Commercial Road, E.

For those who liked it, Toynbee Hall was an admirable place, and fulfilled a very useful function in providing cheap board and lodging and decent society for friendless strangers. I, however, didn't like it at all, and left early. Not to put too fine a point upon it, I was asked to leave.

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Toynbee Hall, I should explain, was—and I believe still is—conducted on the lines of an Oxford “Settlement.” In my brief day it was run by the late Canon Barnett, assisted by a body of deep thinkers and earnest young men just down from the University. They did not put it quite so explicitly perhaps, but their avowed object was certainly to introduce the higher life to the lower orders, and to this desirable end they were indefatigable in conducting meetings among the masses, and delivering lectures on dull (but doubtless improving) subjects whenever they could get anyone to listen to them.

Out of politeness and a genuine desire to meet the wishes of the authorities, I attended the first two of these lectures during my short residence; and out of boredom refrained from attending any others. To my mind, they struck the wrong note. Thus there was too much patronage about them, too much talk about the “deserving poor,” the “blessings of poverty,” and the “privilege of work” etc., to fall on readily receptive ears when delivered, as were these, to hungry outcasts mainly collected from the Whitechapel slums. Occasionally Canon Barnett booked a big-wig for a “simple talk.” He usually got hold of somebody with sufficient sense to adapt himself to his audience (Tree, piloted by Raymond Blathwayt, came along one evening), and who did not attempt to “talk down” to them. I remember, however, one rather bad choice. This was that of a smug prelate—all “gas and gaiters”—who started off with platitudes and ended up with a volley of something very like a

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storm of abuse because his unfortunate hearers were not perfectly contented with their miserable lives. If the expression "Bolshevism" had been invented then, he would probably have applied it to them.

From the very nature of its being, Toynbee Hall could not very well help turning out first-class prigs. A condition (at any rate implied) of residence there was that everybody under its roof should be an "earnest social worker." A very good thing to be, too. Still, not a thing to stress unduly. Thus, on the evening of my arrival, a pallid spectacled youth of about my own age took me aside and anxiously inquired if I were "saved." Not quite catching the question, and thinking he was trying to play the confidence trick on me or else wanted (as preparatory to touching me for a loan) to know how much money I had saved, I rudely told him to mind his own business. This rather damaged the entente, and for some days I was regarded with suspicion. Also, twice during my initial week I neglected to attend morning and evening prayers. There was, of course, no compulsion to attend, but one was expected to do so. This was perfectly reasonable, and it was only a very small return to make for the solid advantages of cheap and comfortable board and lodging, plus decent, if not in every case particularly congenial, society. There were, however, certain restrictions that grated somewhat on abandoned libertines such as myself who wanted complete freedom of action. These restrictions were of course necessary, and Canon Barnett had every right to impose them. As

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he pointed out in a little heart-to-heart talk that he had with me, if one didn't like to observe them, one could always go elsewhere.

I didn't like to observe them, and I did go elsewhere.

4.

But because Toynbee Hall and my exigent self did not happen to suit each other too well, there is not the smallest reason why it should not suit other people. I found it, as I said, cheap and comfortable, and everybody there very friendly. Most of the residents were young clerks and employees of the various business houses in the district. They worked hard, and they took their pleasure simply. Also, they were great on self-culture, forming the backbone of innumerable "circles" and classes where the whole gamut of knowledge—from accountancy to zoology—was supplied by experts, and on very reasonable terms. I joined half-a-dozen "circles" myself, having for their objects the practice of such diverse pursuits as athletics, dancing, debating, drama, and literature, etc.

My failure to fit in with the rather rarefied atmosphere of Toynbee Hall was due to purely temperamental causes. Somehow, and with the best will in the world, I could not take the absorbing interest in the "social conditions of the people" that was clearly expected of me by the higher authorities. The fact is, I was not cut out for a lay missionary. Success in this direction is a gift that has been denied me.

A strong plank in the Toynbee Hall platform was

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the "uplifting of the masses." To the attainment of this highly desirable end, "social evenings" were frequently held, when anybody from the outside who chose to come in was made welcome. The idea was excellent. Unfortunately for its complete success the average programme was apt to be just a little lugubrious, consisting for the most part of a *mélange* of songs, prayers, and lectures, plus hymns and recitations. I think the most daring flight ever introduced was a magic lantern. As this, however, was officially considered "unsettling," it was not repeated.

As a rule, these entertainments passed off with no sort of hitch. Still, I recollect a somewhat unfortunate episode marring one of them. As more than twenty years have passed since the occurrence of this blot on the escutcheon, so to speak, perhaps I may chronicle it now without hurting the feelings of any of the protagonists.

What happened was that the programme on this particular occasion was falling a little flat. A concertina solo (furnished by myself) had somehow failed to rouse real enthusiasm, and even a carefully selected comic song, rendered by a curate, had been received with stony indifference. The deserving poor, who formed the audience, were not living up to their name. They merely shuffled their feet and looked distinctly bored.

In this critical juncture a clerical member of the committee was suddenly seized with a bright idea.

"I think it would be very pleasant," he said mellifluously, "if one of the deah little children I see in the

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room—that is, one of our young friends—would entertain us. Now, is there any little girl or little boy heah who could sing us a song?”

There was a moment's self-conscious silence. Then a small and grubby-faced boy in the back row lifted up his hand.

“Please, Mister,” he called out shrilly, “I ken a song. I'd like to sing it fine.”

The curate who was officiating as chairman beamed approvingly.

“Capital,” he returned, with a patronising smirk. “Ladies and gentlemen, I have much pleasure in announcing that our young friend—er—Master Angus MacDonald—has come all the way from—er—Bonnie Scotland to favour us with one of his national ditties. Step up on the platform my lad, and let us hear you. Don't be shy. We're not going to eat you.”

Not in the least abashed by the publicity thus accorded him, the youthful volunteer was hoisted on to the platform, where he stood for a moment looking stolidly at the audience. Then the curate, amid mild applause, having patted him encouragingly on the shoulder, we awaited developments.

We did not have to wait long, for suddenly the vocalist drew a deep breath. The next moment he lifted up his voice, and in a shrill childish treble and a strong Scotch accent, piped out the following unexpectedly bizarre commencement from his repertoire:—

“Annie Kelly burst her belly
Eating too much bread and jelly!”

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Shrieks of horror from the outraged committee; ribald laughter from the juvenile members of the audience; suppressed titters from the remainder; and abrupt exit, under parental escort, of the budding Caruso.

Altogether a regrettable episode.

CHAPTER III

EAST TO WEST

Whitechapel to Mayfair—Cheap Chambers in Park Lane—A Youthful Editor—Purge for the Public—The *Critic* Staff—Financial Fiasco—Charles Cochran's Beginnings—Enterprising Entrepreneur—Behind the Scenes at the "Miracle."

I.

WHEN I left the East-end, under the circumstances just described, I transferred myself to the West-end. My new address was not exactly Park Lane, but, all the same, it was uncommonly near it. As a matter of fact, it was Down Street, Piccadilly, where I was remarkably comfortable, and at a ridiculously small price.

I think that in no direction has London life changed so much (and for the worse) as it has in the cost of accommodation. Less than a score of years ago there was no real difficulty (that is, if one took a little trouble) in finding cheap and good rooms in any of the turnings off Piccadilly, such as Down Street, Half Moon Street, Clarges Street, and Bolton Street, etc. Although I never had any money worth talking about, I never lived anywhere else during my first fifteen years in London than in the very

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heart of Mayfair. For something under a guinea a week I had a bedroom and a sitting-room in a cul-de-sac a hundred yards from Curzon Street, and I remember once lending a man thirty-five shillings to pay his rent in Park Lane. It sounds incredible, perhaps, but I should explain that this merely connoted a single "combined room" in a block of chambers at the Hamilton Place end. Still, the postal address was Park Lane all right.

It was much the same in Duke Street, Bury Street, Jermyn Street, and St. James's Street, or any of the discreet openings off Pall Mall and the Haymarket. Comfortable bachelor rooms (kept by retired butlers and ex-club servants) could always be had there—not for the asking, certainly, but for a matter of five-and-twenty shillings or so a week. Nowadays, the profiteer is everywhere; and twice this amount is unblushingly demanded for an attic in West Kensington, or two rooms and a bulge in Maida Vale or Pimlico.

And people actually pay it. They can't help themselves.

2.

Although I did not arrive in London with the traditional half-a-crown in my pocket, I did not have very much more. Also, I knew very few people, and had only one letter of introduction to anybody connected with the literary world. It was to a member of the Press Club, then established in dingy premises in Wine Office Court (or perhaps it was Beer Bottle Alley), Fleet Street. This individual talked so airily

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of his work that he rather gave me the idea he was editing *The Times*. As a matter of strict fact, he really occupied an extremely subordinate position on a woman's paper, which then happened to be controlled by, of all people, Arnold Bennett (then, by the way, generally known as Enoch A. Bennett).

On being presented with my letter of introduction, my new acquaintance put down his third "double Scotch" and affably invited me to "have one." I did so, and then had another, and for which (this being a friendly club) I was permitted to pay. After this he suggested that I should lunch with him, and still further added to my indebtedness by borrowing a sovereign from me to settle the bill. The Press Club was a hospitable institution. No stand-offishness or formal introductions required, as the next time I dropped in there two complete strangers each "touched" me for five shillings.

Somehow, I then took a dislike to the place and have never been there since.

The next real journalist I came across was one of a rather different description. He was a very young man, but was editing a very live paper. This was a monthly, the contents of which were chiefly devoted to saying rude and biting things about Hall Caine and Miss Marie Correlli. So far as I remember after this long interval, other accepted authors whom the youthful editor chastened in print were Jerome K. Jerome and S. R. Crockett, together with the leading members of what was then known as the "Kailyard School." Still, he cannot have done them

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much harm by his fulminations, as they flourished like green bay trees, whereas his journal drooped and languished. In fact, the *Anti-Philistine*, as this entertaining organ was well called, expired in great agony after only three appearances. Its early decease was regrettable, for it served as a good sound corrective and wholesome purge to the flood of fulsome booming and indiscriminate log-rolling that then obtained. Unfortunately, though, it was more than a bit in advance of its time.

3.

There being no money in the editorial till to pay me for what I had contributed, the proprietor did the next best thing, and introduced me to somebody who did happen to be in a position to pay for work. This was one Henry Hess, who had recently started a journal called the *Critic*.

Hess was an astute Hebrew, and as such had made (and lost) a good deal of money in South Africa before the Boer War upset things for his compatriots. On his return to London he conceived the idea that the ownership and direction of a weekly paper would further his various financial schemes. He may have known something about finance (though I rather doubt it, as he became bankrupt and finished up in prison), but he certainly knew precious little about conducting a paper.

Hess's organ, the *Critic*, was a curious production, and aimed at securing much the same sort of public

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as *Truth*. Thus it dealt with society, literature, drama, sport, and finance—mostly with finance—and a few other things as well. There was probably a “Ladies Column” (I seem to remember helping to fill it), and there was certainly a weekly short story. I was considered—I don’t know why, but Fleet Street has always been a world of mystery—an expert on military matters, and was accordingly commissioned to write a column a week “showing up” the War Office. In this capacity I called on Lord Wolseley (or whoever it was that happened to be in control) to “resign” at least once a month, and also said—or rather wrote—fierce things about all the other generals of whom the exigent Hess disapproved. I think he disapproved of most of the military big-wigs, as they had upset his money-making plans in Johannesburg. Still, my angry diatribes left them perfectly calm. At any rate, no “resignations” were tendered.

During the *Critic's* short, and not too prosperous career Hess managed to get some clever people round him. Among the staff were two of whom the literary world has since heard a good deal. One was a shy youth with a lisp and a sense of humour somewhat out of place in Leadenhall Street, where the office was then established. This was Neil Lyons, who has since blossomed into the author of a dozen well known novels and a couple of successful plays. The other was Leonard Rees, now editing the *Sunday Times*.

The staff also included William Purvis (a very sound journalist, and afterwards acting-editor of the

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Sunday Sun). In the *Critic's* early days it was also served by a very superior youth, just down from Oxford. He did not, however, stay with us long, for, discovering that his companions were what he called "middle class," he promptly transferred himself elsewhere. The paper to which he then went was the *Morning Leader* (we always wondered that he had not selected the *Morning Post*), and he is now with a publishing firm that specialises in issuing the memoirs of the real nobility. This must be a great deal more congenial to him than writing paragraphs about vulgar people who got into trouble with the police.

The *Critic* was always in low water financially, caused to a great extent by the proprietor's hobby for having libel actions brought against him. He certainly won most of them, but to win a libel action is only very little less costly than to lose it. Libel actions, indeed, were among the commonplaces of the *Critic's* existence. One such eventually proved too strong for it, and the paper collapsed in an atmosphere of writs and legal documents. I don't know where the staff went, but the proprietor went to the Old Bailey, and after that to Wormwood Scrubbs. I was sorry for Hess, and to use a cliché beloved of journalists, I really think he was more sinned against than sinning, or as Master Neil Lyons put it, "more syndicate than sinning."

A natural consequence of Hess's chronic financial troubles was that our salaries were seldom forthcoming with any degree of regularity. Still, we were a merry crew, and whenever a month's arrears materi-

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alized, it was our innocent practice to dine together in a private room at a dingy Soho restaurant. I wonder if C. B. Cochran (who now looms so large in the theatrical world) remembers coming with me to a gathering of this sort, when he contributed to the after-dinner harmony by bursting into song, and Neil Lyons recited?

4.

At the time to which I am referring I saw a good deal of Cochran. None of us who knew him then dreamed that he would ever come to the position he has since secured. It has been the result of sheer hard work, plus a certain measure of opportunity and luck, but with the hard work predominating throughout.

When I first knew Cochran he was always accompanied by a very tall and somewhat cadaverous looking companion, who designed posters. His name was Scotson Clark, but he was invariably dubbed "Cochran's Clerk," the theory, presumably, being that he attended to his correspondence for him. As a matter of fact, however, Cochran's letters did not keep himself busy in those days. He was full of plans, but they were just a bit in advance of their period, and, somehow, did not materialize.

But still, even at that date, and when he was still well on the sunny side of thirty, Cochran had had an eventful career. A Sussex man by birth, he had passed a good deal of his boyhood at Brighton and Eastbourne with Aubrey Beardsley, whose sister I

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met through him. At eighteen he went on the stage. This was in America, where he spent nearly ten years first as an actor and afterwards on Richard Mansfield's business staff. Although he often told me that Mansfield himself—a notoriously difficult person to please—would not admit it, Cochran was quite a good average actor, especially in light comedy.

The London stage, however, had no particular use for him when he returned to England, and his fortunes at this period were far from flourishing. He had a "business office," consisting of an attic somewhere high up under the roof at the top of a vast number of stairs in New Court, Lincoln's Inn, where he, Scotson Clark, and myself hatched wonderful schemes for setting the Thames on fire in a novel way. The insurance world, however, kept calm, and I never heard of the premiums being increased. I fancy the main idea was that I should write a deathless drama, Scotson Clark should design the posters, and Cochran should produce it. Neither Scotson Clark nor myself were very definite. Cochran, however, was extremely definite, and I think this is why success has eventually crowned his efforts.

In those day Cochran and I often used to explore Soho restaurants together, the sort of places where—in happy pre-war times—one got eighteen courses for eighteen pence. There was a cheering rumour that in some of them one also got twopence handed back on going out at the door, but this was an exaggeration. An establishment in Greek Street enjoyed our patronage longest. I forget the precise reason, but

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probably the portions were larger than at rival restaurants. What perhaps impressed me mostly in its favour was that the proprietor—a stout Gascon—fed there himself, thus inspiring confidence. After a month or so, however, the quality of the food and the cooking fell off appreciably. At last it got so bad that Cochran—always a man of courage and resource—summoned the solitary waiter and demanded to see the *patron*.

“Ah, Santa Maria! Corpo di Bacco! But you cannot zee ’im,” was the answer. “Zee proprietor ’e now always go to anozzer place for zee lonch!”

Coming straight from the horse’s mouth like this it seemed a good tip. We followed it.

Cochran’s first essay to secure a foothold on the slippery steps of theatrical London was to run an agency somewhere in a backwater of the Adelphi. Although he succeeded in introducing one or two “turns” at the Pavilion (which he now controls) Fortune did not exactly smile on the venture. Better luck, however, befell him when he became Hackenschmidt’s official representative. The wrestling “boom” had just begun, and Cochran, then, as now, a shrewd business man, pushed the Alien expert (and incidentally himself) well into the limelight. People simply tumbled over one another to see the redoubtable “top of the bill,” and a substantial proportion of the box-office receipts for the privilege of doing so went very properly into the pockets of his entrepreneur. When, and as presently happened, the novelty-loving public got tired of wrestlers, and

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transformed their affections to performing fleas—or whatever it was that took Hackenschmidt's place as a "draw"—Cochran got busy with something else.

I fancy, however, that his real start on the managerial road he has since followed so successfully was his running of the "Miracle" at Olympia (before Reinhardt introduced it to Berlin). It is one of the commonplaces of amusement-catering history in London that this particular enterprise began badly and exerted very little appeal to the public. Then something in the nature of a real "miracle" occurred. Coy Fortune suddenly turned round the other way. The empty benches became crammed with enraptured West Kensingtonians, and the "house-full" boards were legitimately required. Nobody quite knew why (although a certain pushing journalist declared it to be due to an egregious puff from himself), but from that moment the "Miracle" began to attract enormous audiences, and it became distinctly "the thing" to go and see it.

I went to Olympia one evening with Cochran himself. I was much too polite to say so, but—Reinhardt or no Reinhardt—the "Miracle" struck me as a pretty tawdry piece of pseudo-religious humbug if none the less calculated to pull in the unthinking crowd. Wandering behind the scenes during an interval, I was chiefly impressed by the spectacle of a row of fat actors (who, five minutes earlier, had been posturing as priests and disciples, etc.) sitting round a table swigging beer and playing half-penny

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nap. No particular reason why they shouldn't, of course; still, it seemed just a trifle incongruous.

In the period between the launching of the "Miracle" at Olympia and the attaining of the very considerable position he now occupies, a vast amount of water has passed under the theatrical bridges. I am, however, not going to attempt to span it. After all, this is not the life story of Charles Blake Cochran. Besides, he is quite clever enough to write it himself.

CHAPTER IV

VESTIGIA JUVENILIS

Literary "Salons"—Russell Square Récamier—No Gratitude in Grub Street—Map-making Extraordinary—Stead's Cold Douche—"Correspondence Schools"—Literary Lions—Storm in a Teacup—Barrie and the Halls—Identity Discs for Authors.

1.

FROM what I hear of it, I understand that there are still "salons" of sorts in places like St. John's Wood and Chelsea. I dropped into one of these curious circles (established in Bloomsbury) before I had been a month in London. It was run by a warm-hearted and ambitious widow, with literary inclinations and a partiality for the society of young authors and journalists. This Récamier of Russell Square meant well, certainly, but to tell the truth her train was composed of pretty small fry. Still, it included a few people who have been heard of since. Among such were the accomplished woman author who writes as "George Egerton," Richard le Gallienne (then very busy looking for "Golden Girls"), Felix Mansfield (brother of Richard Mansfield), James Welch, and Charles Cochran, etc. The rest of us counted for

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very little. We read and talked about our poems and articles and stories, and listened to those of our hostess, and also consumed large quantities of her food. This was not purely mental, for she kept an uncommonly good table. I am afraid that some of the gathering abused her hospitality, for they openly called the house the "free lunch counter," laughed covertly at its fair owner's literary efforts, and shamelessly borrowed her money.

What was worse, however, was that one recipient of her bounty metaphorically bit the hand that nourished him. At any rate, when he had a difference of opinion with this amiable lady he unkindly lampooned her in an impudent novel.

No gratitude in Grub Street!

Among the curious throng haunting this Bloomsbury "salon" was the late Cyril Ranger Gull, then just down from Oxford. He was, even in those distant days, a burner of midnight oil; and, until his death a few months ago, produced an unceasing flood of volumes of various shapes, sizes, and descriptions on all sorts of subjects. Under his own name he did some quite good work, producing a really first-class historical romance in "The Serf." Under the signature, however, of Guy Thorne, he turned his attention to another, less exacting field of endeavour, the writing of "religious" melodrama. The most successful example was one called "When It Was Dark." A kind-hearted (but sadly uncritical) prelate boomed it lustily from the pulpit, with the result that it

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achieved a big sale and ran through a mouth-watering number of editions.

While the Boer War was in progress Gull was on the staff of a short-lived paper which the hostilities and the Brothers Harmsworth had brought into being. On a certain memorable afternoon editorial instructions were given him to draw a rough diagram of a section of South Africa, illustrating the operations at the front. He had no idea of cartography, but being a sound journalist, this did not stand in his way at all. As a matter of fact, he brought the job round to me, and we sat up all night doing it between us.

The result of our joint labours was a truly wonderful "map," and one that would probably have considerably astonished Stanley and any other African explorers who happened to see it. This was chiefly due to the fact that, as we did not possess an atlas (and looked upon the purchase of one as an unnecessary extravagance), we located the various towns just where fancy dictated. I had a bit of an argument with my collaborator when he insisted on putting Johannesburg on the sea coast and Capetown north of Kimberly. Suddenly, however, I had one of those quickly passing flashes of inspiration that come to all of us at times. Snatching up a pen just as we were about to hand our effort to a waiting messenger from the office, I wrote on the margin:—

"It should be noted that, with a view to avoiding any assistance being given to the enemy (should this map fall into their hands) the various positions shown thereon are not entirely accurate."

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The editor, who was probably quite as foggy on the subject as we were ourselves, swallowed this without a murmur, and the "map" duly appeared, "from our special correspondent at the front," and was an immense success.

During the war I encountered this bright scheme of mine still further elaborated. This time its adopter was a well known stay-at-home strategist who was conducting a much boomed journal, and one from which all the leading "indispensables" were deriving their weekly pabulum. Studying the "specially drawn map" issued with one of his famous descriptive articles, I saw with some surprise that Toulon was put north of Bordeaux, and Amiens (where I happened to be at the moment) south of Paris. I was no geographer myself, but I felt instinctively that this did not look correct. Also, it quite failed to fit in with the allocation of these particular resorts on the official ordnance sheet furnished me by G. H. Q. A footnote, however, solved the mystery:—"In accordance with the requirements of the censor," it naïvely remarked, "the positions giving the various strategical points on this map are merely approximate."

There is no copyright in ideas, I admit. Still, there is such a thing as ordinary decent feeling among brother pressmen. Yet, when I applied for a small royalty, I could not get any answer. This rankled. It showed ingratitude.

2.

When I first came up to London, and was fonder of writing to complete strangers than I am now, I

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actually had the impudence to bombard a number of established literary men with letters asking for advice. My only excuse is that I was then very young, and one does such things (or worse) at twenty.

This piece of unwarrantable impudence elicited two replies. The first was from W. T. Stead, who wrote in obviously very angry (but, under the circumstances, not unjustifiable) terms:—

“I don’t see why I should be bothered to advise you or anybody else, and I decline to do so. Nor do I want to read your silly specimens, which are returned herewith.”

The other reply came as balm to my wounded vanity:—

“No necessity to apologize for troubling me. I find it so hard, however, to secure any real foothold in literature myself that I don’t feel at all qualified to give other people hints on the subject. I have read the stories and articles you enclosed, and if you can always keep up this standard you ought in time to do very well for yourself. Don’t be discouraged at getting your stuff returned. It happens to all of us, and very often to myself.”

Not much in it, perhaps. Still, a decided improvement on Stead’s douche, and which, by the way, I sold the next morning for half a crown to a collector of autographs.

The writer of this second letter was Max Pemberton.

I never saw Max Pemberton in my life, and I doubt if he is even aware of my existence. Still,

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somebody at the School of Journalism he directs has apparently heard of it, for the other day this individual sent me a prospectus, with the suggestion that I should take up a course.

One of these fine days I must think about doing so. "Leader writing in ten Lessons" certainly sounds attractive. At present, however, I am seriously considering the offer of a rival establishment to teach me "Publishing by Correspondence."

It was not Pemberton's "school," but another, from which I received an alluring pamphlet, entitled *Success in Authorship*. The section that interested me most was one headed, "Formation of Literary Style." Among the "rules" on this important subject was the following:—"Never use a preposition to finish a sentence with."

When I wrote to the expert enquiring how long it was since "with" had ceased to be a preposition, I got no answer. Still, I won't say a word against "Schools of Journalism." After all, Robert Hichens graduated in one of them.

Talking of "correspondence schools," there seems to be no limit to the curricula they offer by "postal tuition" nowadays. They cater for practically all requirements. Thus, in addition to novel writing, there are "postal" courses of instruction in acting, dancing, portrait painting, and even public speaking. I am only waiting for particulars of a reliable one in, say, lion taming. It is sure to come.

I once thought of investigating the claims of a memory system, which was (and still is) being some-

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what extensively advertized. There was, however, a hitch before I really got very far in the matter. What happened was that after writing for a prospectus nothing further occurred. When I wrote again drawing attention to this omission, I received an apologetic letter from the principal: "Very sorry, but we quite forgot your esteemed request." My fault, perhaps, but a "memory system" run on these lines struck me as unsatisfactory. There was, or so it seemed to me, something wanting about it.

Shortly after my arrival in London I joined a club. It was quite a small one, and with very unpretentious premises—merely three or four rooms—in an unfashionable street off the Haymarket. For a name the Macaulay is suggestive enough, since the members were all by way of being *bona fide* literary men. The practice of literature, indeed, plus ability to pay with average punctuality a modest annual subscription, was the only qualification demanded. But literature had to be practised seriously, and candidates for membership who had not published at least one volume were required to prove to the committee that they had earned a minimum of £50 by journalism. This was a sound rule, and ensured the club being rigidly confined to professional authors, while it severely kept at a distance the pushing and moneyed amateur who wanted (Heaven knows why) to rub shoulders with us. The result was, there were some really well known people on the books, the list including at various times Hall Caine, Conan Doyle, Anthony Hope, Gilbert Parker, Arnold Bennett, Frankfort

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Moore, Cutcliffe Hyne (then using the pseudonym of "Wetherby Chesney"), and H. A. Vachell, etc., together with a considerable admixture of absolute small fry like myself. All the same, we latter did useful work, if only in furnishing the necessary audience, for even lions soon get tired of roaring if there is no one to listen to them.

The Macaulay was a friendly club; everybody talked freely to everybody else, and the tritons did not (and as happens elsewhere) consider it beneath their dignity to notice the existence of the minnows. This was largely assured by the excellent custom that prevailed of every one sitting at a common table for luncheon and dinner. At tea-time especially it was a great place for talk. In fact, too much so, if one wanted to sit down quietly and read a paper or write a letter. Somebody would drop in and start an argument, or offer a violent criticism on the "best-seller" of the day. Somebody else would take it up, and a fierce discussion would immediately arise above the tinkle of tea cups.

This practice once led to a serious disturbance of the club's harmony. So far as I remember after this interval, what happened was that some iconoclast among us advanced the daring assertion that Maurice Hewlett's "Forest Lovers," which had recently appeared, was "rubbish." Frankfort Moore, always an impulsive and warm-hearted champion of sound craftsmanship and style, promptly told the individual putting forward this view that he was talking "nonsense." As a matter of fact, he used another and

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more expressive word, but as this book is intended for readers of both sexes, "nonsense" will serve. Thereupon the recipient of Moore's polyphonic candour lost his temper. A good many other people did the same. Partisans sprang up on either side, and in a few minutes something like a battle-royal was raging between the Hewlett-phobes and the Hewlett-philes. Personally, I was among the latter. I found myself, however—and as I generally do—in the minority. The feud lasted for days, with the result that one half of the club was not on speaking terms with the other. Then something more important cropped up, and the original cause of the dispute was forgotten. Frankfort Moore, however, refused to be so easily placated. He demanded an apology from the member who had (no doubt unwittingly) started the rumpus. When he didn't get it he resigned.

Frankfort Moore's defection was a real loss to the club. He had, perhaps, a quick Irish temper, but he was extremely genial, witty, and amusing, and possessed moreover of a tremendous fund of stories. Except that he never played idiotic practical jokes, he was to us very much what Theodore Hook must have been to the Athenæum seventy years earlier.

There were people who said that the committee ought to have interfered. Personally, I think they showed their sense by declining to do so. When a club committee attempts to adjust a private difference of opinion between members it almost invariably makes matters ten times worse. The example of what

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happened at the Garrick (Thackeray v. Yates, Dickens intervening) is a case in point.

A feature of the Macaulay was that of giving monthly dinners at which lions from the outer world were the guests. People of real distinction used to accept our invitations. Among those whom I remember seeing gathered round our modest board (but only one of them at a time) were Barrie, Chesterton, Roberts, Tree, and Wolseley, etc. When Barrie dined with us he arrived very late. The chairman, in fact, got so anxious that he began to discuss the propriety of sitting down without him. Suddenly, however, a small shy figure, whom we recognized as the guest of the evening, was ushered into the crowded room. For a moment he stood blinking nervously at the assembled company. Then, having greeted the chairman, he explained that he had unwittingly gone to another club with a somewhat similar name, where the hall-porter had sternly reprimanded him for entering by the front door instead of by the area steps.

It took a Barrie to carry off such an episode.

Talking of Barrie, the only story concerning him that has the merit of not having appeared in print quite so often as the overworked host of others is the following:—

At a certain suburban music hall a sketch company was running through his "Twelve Pound Look." A couple of "cross-talk" experts, waiting their turn to occupy the stage, watched the progress of the rehearsal with immense interest. The Barrie touch seemed

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to appeal to them, too, for on its conclusion one of them went up to the leading actor.

"Say, Mister," he remarked, "that's a good sketch you're playing. Class, and all that, if you understand me. Who wrote it?"

"Glad you like it," was the reply. "The author is Sir James Barrie."

"Never 'eard of 'im," declared the enquirer. "Well, Alf, what do you think of this 'ere Barrie?" he added, turning to his companion.

"Good stuff! Can't say as 'ow the name's familiar, but anyway, 'e writes our next."

The club dinners I liked best at the Macaulay, and which I always made a point of attending, were those when Henry Arthur Jones was in the Chair. The chief reason was that he had a hospitable practice of providing champagne for his fellow members.

Henry Arthur Jones is a very difficult person to get any change out of in a controversy. His polemical "My Dear Wells," with its pungent neologisms, is an instance in point, but I am not so sure—good reading as it is—that it was really worth a whole book. Apropos the unfortunate difference of opinion that had arisen between these two clever people, when, in discussing the volume in a newspaper, I happened to say that Diogenes himself had some difficulty in discovering Truth at the bottom of wells, the dramatist sent me a copy of his book. On the flyleaf was an inscription—"Truth is neither in this nor in any other part of the Wellsian anatomy."

Apparently this made Wells a bit peevish, for he

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thereupon gave it out as his considered opinion of the author that "one might as well expect reason from three pennyworth of catsmeat as from a mind of this sort."

It is not for me to judge, but it seems to me very much of a case of honours being easy.

Although the Macaulay was certainly by way of being a literary club, from time to time we made our little mistakes like other people. The star instance concerned one of our monthly dinners to celebrities. On this occasion the committee, understanding that he was an American author of some distinction, invited a certain Mr. Clemens, then visiting London, to be the club's guest. Nobody, however, seemed to know just who this Mr. Clemens was, or the precise degree of importance attaching to him in the world of letters. Also, nobody seemed to care particularly. At any rate, there was considerable difficulty in finding a volunteer to act as chairman. Still, a quite obscure member was at length persuaded to accept the office, and accordingly set to work to prepare a speech proposing the guest's health. On the day before the dinner, however, the secretary came to him in great perturbation.

"Fearfully sorry, old chap," he said apologetically, "but there's been some mistake. The committee have decided to have the club president in the Chair now. Hope you don't mind?"

"Not at all," was the relieved response, "but why this sudden change?"

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The secretary looked more uncomfortable than ever.

"Well, the fact is," he said, "it has only just come out that this chap Clemens is really Mark Twain."

4.

The uninitiated don't seem to believe it, but literary people as a class look very much like anybody else. Barring, of course, the poets, only a few men among them have long hair (most of them, as it happens, have next to none), and even women novelists seldom have anything about their appearance by which they are distinguished outwardly. Possibly our leading authors look just a little more stupid and commonplace than ordinary individuals, but this is merely a matter of opinion.

Personally, I wish all such people had, like stage folk, some easily perceptible stigmata by which they could be told at sight. It would save a lot of awkward errors, such as one that I once made. I had bought a couple of tickets on this occasion for the annual dinner of a certain Society to which I belonged, and at which all the most dazzling lights of the literary world were to be present. The scene of the gathering was the Metropole, and I took with me a woman friend to whom I had been boasting of my intimate acquaintance with eminent writers.

On reaching the Metropole I told the flunkey at the door that we had come to the dinner. He seemed far less impressed by the announcement than I con-

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sidered fitting, and merely remarked in an offhand tone, "first room on the right."

We went there obediently. The vast room was crammed full of people, and getting fuller every moment. I scanned the faces of the throng anxiously, but was unable to recognize a single one of them. As a matter of fact, the assembly of stout and rather gross-looking men (the majority of whom had red silk handkerchiefs tucked into their shirt fronts, and what are, I understand, technically termed "Gent's Alberts," dangling from their waistcoat pockets) struck me as being much more like a pack of pork butchers than anything else. However, to save my reputation and satisfy my companion's natural curiosity, I pointed out Kipling and Barrie and Hall Caine, and various other people of importance whose names occurred to me on the spur of the moment, and all was well.

A lively imagination, I need scarcely say, is one of my gifts.

Presently, as I was making a vigorous effort to identify somebody whom I really did know, a steward bustled up to me and inquired rather pointedly whose guest I was.

"I'm not a guest at all," I returned, "I'm a member."

As the inquisitive fellow, instead of abjectly apologizing, still appeared a little doubtful, I pulled out my card of invitation and handed it to him with an air of quiet triumph.

"Sorry, sir," he said, after a swift glance at it, "but

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you've been shown into the wrong room. There are several public dinners in the hotel to-night. Yours is in the next room to this."

"Then who are all these people?" I demanded. "And what are they doing here?"

"Oh, these are the members of the London Meat Traders' Association. They are having their annual banquet here this evening."

A judgment, this, on me for my idle boasting. Still, it was just the sort of thing that might have happened to anybody.

One of these fine days some pushful business man will bring out an identity disc for authors. When he does so, he will prove himself a public benefactor.

CHAPTER V

SALONS AND CIRCLES

The Old School Actor—A Magnificent Mummer—Problem for Shakespeareans—Cranks in Clubland—Bible Up-to-date—Sociology in Theory and Practice—Punch-bowl Habitues—Pathetic Ballad—Bygone Bohemia.

1.

THE Macaulay, in the days when I knew it, had a certain number of members more or less connected with the Stage. Prominent among such was John Coleman. His name is now quite forgotten; but at one time he had, I understand, a fair vogue, especially in the provinces. He was distinctly an actor of what is termed the "old school." He looked like one, too, and in appearance and manner suggested at least two Vincent Crummles's rolled into one. Thus, he never spoke without making a speech and striking an attitude; and was always the "heavy father" and tragedian to even the limited audience gathered round the club fire-place.

I remember once, when desirous of ingratiating myself with the old gentleman (I probably wanted to get theatre tickets out of him), asking if he had ever played the Ghost in Hamlet.

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"Laddie" (all actors invariably adopt this term), he answered with a magnificent gesture, "you inquire of me have I—John Coleman—ever portrayed the Ghost in Hamlet? Let me tell you, young sir, I *created* the part. It was at Swindon, in the year '61—before you were born or thought of!"

There is a story of Coleman, which, while probably quite untrue, is mildly entertaining. It happened that there was a shy youth in the club, who was engaged preparing a ponderous work on the "Private Lives of Shakespeare's Heroines," or something equally thrilling. Becoming suddenly stuck in his researches, he was advised to consult our friend. Accordingly, he invited the expert to luncheon, and pumped him assiduously throughout the meal.

Poor old Coleman, who merely wanted to play a good knife-and-fork act, got horribly bored. However—and as he did not often get a square meal at somebody else's expense (for things were not going too well with him just then)—he put up with it in an exemplary fashion and answered all the problems submitted to him. Presently, his questioner fired his last shot.

"Pray tell me, Mr. Coleman," he said, with a blush at his temerity, "is it in your opinion—not only as an eminent actor, but also as a profound Shakespearean scholar—a fact that—er—immoral relationships ever existed between Hamlet and Ophelia?"

Coleman drank a glass of whisky—"quaffed a bumper," as he would have expressed it—struck an attitude, and then declaimed in a booming voice:

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"Young sir, you ask me have immoral relationships ever existed between Hamlet and Ophelia? 'Tis upwards of thirty years now since I doffed the sock and buskin. But—and unless the times have altered materially since then—I should say it was, and is, the invariable practice!"

Towards the end of his life John Coleman was, I am afraid, not too flourishing, and professional engagements were few and far between. Still, he actually managed to acquire a short lease of Drury Lane, where he produced a lurid and Antipodean melodrama, called "The Duchess of Coolgardie." The London public were not over enthusiastic about it; and, after the first few nights, the audiences grew so attenuated that the bold lessee found it difficult to fill more than a row or two of stalls. One evening, however, he had an inspiration. Chartering a fleet of cabs, he despatched them to the club, with instructions to bring back every member on the premises.

2.

The Macaulay, like all other literary clubs, had some cranks among its membership. A particularly quaint specimen of the genus was one Hereward Drake. This merchant's great idea was to popularize the Bible, a task which he regarded as his special mission in life. According to his way of thinking, the principal reason why the Scriptures were not more generally read was that their language was not sufficiently modernized. Bring the Bible up-to-

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date, he argued, in effect, and everybody will read it.

When he had written to several prominent authors and novelists, suggesting their collaboration, and found them singularly unresponsive to his overtures, he was not in the least upset. Our zealous friend was made of stern stuff. If Meredith and Spencer and Hall Caine, and all the others to whom he applied, refused the scheme any assistance, well, he would do the job himself; and all the honour and all the glory would then be his.

The industrious expositor, who, it must be observed, regarded his self-appointed task with the utmost reverence, thereupon set to work; and in the fulness of time produced a specimen chapter. The plan he adopted was to give one verse of the original, followed by one showing how, in his opinion, it ought to be re-written so as to ensure a really big public. Selecting for a start the First Book of Kings, this is a fair sample of his handiwork:

“I Kings, xiii, 7. And the king said unto the man of God, Come home with me, and refresh thyself, and I will give thee a reward.”

The Hereward Drake version: “His Majesty said to the clergyman, ‘Come along home with me, old chap, and I’ll stand you a drink, and make it worth your while.’”

I think only one chapter of this remarkable labour of love was printed, and that in pamphlet form. When it fell flat, except for a few ribald reviewers, the proud author was fearfully disappointed. Still, his diligence was not really wasted, for the governing

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body of a certain colonial university appeared so impressed by his scholarship that the gifted fellow was appointed to its Chair of English Literature and Biblical Research; and among the backwoodsmen and sheep-shearers at any rate he found fruitful soil.

3.

A literary man of another description, and with whom I once had some slight business association, was a certain Professor Samuel Smith, D.D. I say "certain," because I do not suppose that his name and fame as an author will exactly go ringing down the ages. Still, he wrote some learned and ponderous volumes on sociology and kindred matters. These simply bristled with statistics; and it was my part (in return for modest remuneration) to dig out from the archives of the Royal Statistical Society figures to fit his theories.

Some of the professor's theories were a little curious, and it was often a difficult job to square them with the extracts which I supplied from the official reports and Government blue books. For instance, he once wanted to prove that bachelors lived longer (or possibly, died sooner) than married men, and my figures (based on the authority of the Census returns) showed quite another result.

The worthy professor was very much annoyed with me, and hinted at ending our contract.

"This sort of thing won't do," he said severely. "Your statistics must fit my contentions, not my con-

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tentions your statistics. Just understand that, young man."

Knowing on which side my bread was buttered, I promptly went on another tack; and, after that, was careful to produce nothing but figures that backed up my patron's accompanying "views" all right. I fancy, though, some of them would not have been accepted off-hand by the Registrar-General. Still, Professor Smith was satisfied, and his readers regarded him as a prodigy of scholarship.

The charitable contention that all men—irrespective of their colour, race, or creed—are absolutely equal and entitled to the same treatment was prominent among the theories that this expert set out to substantiate. He was very full of this, and made it the basis of several lectures which he delivered in public. One evening, after reading a learned paper on the subject to a body of brother anthropologists, he invited me to supper with him at the Trocadero.

As we took our seats, and he glanced round the crowded room, I noticed my companion's brow grow blacker and blacker. A thunder cloud appeared to have descended on it, and he lost all his customary urbanity. I was wondering what had upset him, when, with an imperious gesture, he summoned the manager.

"What do you mean," he demanded angrily, pointing to a dusky complexioned Hindu supping peaceably at an adjoining table, "by allowing niggers in here?"

In the course of his sociological researches my

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friend, the learned Professor Smith, had to pay some attention to the subject of crime and its punishment. With a view to studying the matter at first hand, this entailed visiting several London prisons. In my dual capacity of aide-de-camp and private secretary, I accompanied him to a number of these institutions, among such being Pentonville, Wandsworth, Wormwood Scrubbs, and Holloway, etc. The experience was an interesting one. It was, however, none the less a saddening one also, for what we saw at each place was convincing proof that the whole system of imprisonment was an utter failure so far as went the effecting of any sort of reformatory influence upon those subjected to its operations. If this were not the case, it stands to reason that recidivists would be unknown. But what happens in reality is just the reverse.

At Pentonville we were handed over to the prison chaplain, who constituted himself our guide for the afternoon. I hope he was not typical of his class, for he was quite the most unctuous and smugly self-satisfied cleric I have ever encountered; and expatiated *ad nauseam* on the "reformatory effect" and "deterrent influence" of imprisonment.

I soon had a convincing illustration to the contrary.

It happened in the course of our stroll round the place that I noticed a most respectable looking old man—from his appearance, indeed, he might have been a publisher, or perhaps an author of memoirs—picking oakum, and was told that he was nearly eighty.

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"I suppose this is the first time he's been in prison," I remarked, when we were out of earshot.

"Very far from it," was the reply. "As a matter of fact, that old ruffian has been repeatedly convicted, and has spent nearly forty years in prison."

I may have been wrong, but it struck me that prolonged and repeated imprisonment had not effected much "reform" where this individual was concerned; nor, obviously, had it deterred him from his evil courses. Yet, when I suggested this to the chaplain, he merely looked annoyed. Major Davies, however, the governor (he has since retired), with whom I afterwards had a talk, took a different view.

"There's a lot of cant talked," he said, "about prison 'reforming' people. It doesn't reform anyone, and never did. Nor does it 'deter' a criminal. The most it does is to protect Society for the time being. Half the poor devils in here are victims of circumstance as much as anything else."

At Holloway, which is used solely as a prison for women, an equally saddening spectacle was afforded by the presence of a large number of babies. I am not a sociologist myself; but it certainly seems to me that there is something decidedly wrong with a penal system which makes it possible to begin and end life in the grim surroundings of a prison.

4.

After a time the Macaulay got into rather low water. The big guns among us disappeared into the

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fastnesses of the Athenæum and the Reform; those of lesser calibre went to the Authors (where they were much more comfortable) and the Savile, and new members to replace them seemed shy of joining. Thereupon, the committee took a step which the old nucleus always regretted. They toyed with the mammon of a proprietor, who made a proposal to take us over, lock, stock and barrel. The offer was accepted. From that moment the Macaulay ceased to exist as a members' club, and became a proprietary body, run merely as a money-making concern for a syndicate or "synagogue," as rude people put it.

Of course, the inevitable happened. We were, it is true, freed of financial responsibility, but we lost our personality. The new proprietor appointed a pushful secretary, whose one thought was concentrated on mere numbers. A touting campaign was organized, and the membership, as a result, went up by leaps and bounds. All sorts of ragtag-and-bobtail were brought in, some of them having no sort of connection with literature at all. A vast host of Americans and Colonials were permitted to join as "overseas" members, some of whom, when we saw them, gave us the impression of being "half seas over" members. The committee were powerless, for the syndicate held a pistol to their heads, loaded with the threat "get members, or get out."

A good many of us did "get out." I was one of them. Together with a few others of similar views, I betook myself elsewhere. It was just as well, too,

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for, shortly after our departure, the Macaulay ceased to exist.

Cause and effect? Perhaps.

5.

A pleasant little Bohemian club to which I went occasionally (and which has now vanished into the *Ewigkeit*), was the Punch Bowl. It was situated on an upper floor in Regent Street, and was owned and managed by Percy Wood, a clever sculptor and a man of great personal charm. This made it a success, and, as a consequence, everybody wanted to join.

A peculiarity of the Punch Bowl was that (except for a venerable butler, who had come out of Lord Tennyson's house), it had no servants. Presumably, there was a cook, but one never saw him. The idea was for members to help themselves and put the money in a box kept for that purpose on the mantelpiece. If—and as often happened—one had no money, the accepted custom was to deposit an I. O. U. and redeem it when better times came along. The genial Wood did not worry; and I don't fancy he lost anything by his attitude of trust.

"The club belongs to me," he once explained, when I was tactless enough to question him on the subject. "Nobody joins it without my approval. If I'm fool enough to approve of a wrong 'un, well, I deserve to get let down."

He never did get "let down" to any great degree. As he said, he picked his members; and people did

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not get in as a matter of course, and merely because they happened to be proposed and seconded, as is the case in practically every other club. One met people of real distinction there. I myself was, of course, not nearly distinguished enough to be a member, but I used to be taken in by Richard le Gallienne and Mostyn Piggott, who at the time was writing topical verses for the *World*, which was then a paper that counted. Among those I met gathered round the hospitable board were Winnington-Ingram (then Bishop of Stepney), J. M. Barrie (who had not yet blossomed into Sir James), Teixeira de Mattos (a most accomplished literary man, and one to whom this country is indebted for a series of admirable translations of the works of foreign authors of repute), William Nicholson and his partner, James Pryde (then known in artistic circles as the "Beggarstaffe Brothers"), Phil May, Charles Cochran and Max Beerbohm. This was before Beerbohm grew his present moustache, and was still contriving to look extraordinarily like Sickert's *Vanity Fair* cartoon of him a few years earlier. By the way, collectors may be interested to learn that somewhere about this period he contributed a number of drawings to the *Strand Magazine*, bearing the now unrecognizable signature, H. Maxwell Beerbohm. Altogether an amazingly interesting group.

The Punch Bowl was a late haunt, and was at its best and brightest towards midnight, when people would drop in for what Wood called an "early breakfast." Once when I was there a man sitting

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next me at supper (and whose previous conduct had not seemed suspicious), declared his intention of reciting. As he was bigger than most of us, and was, moreover, in a distinctly argumentative mood, we thought it best to let him carry out his horrid threat. Thereupon, he rose unsteadily to his feet, and delivered himself of this truly pathetic ditty:—

BALLAD OF SALLY MORGAN.

'Ave you 'eard of Sally Morgan,
Who should 'ave been George Johnsing's wife?
First 'e gets 'er into troub-u-el,
Then 'e ups and takes a knife.

"Ow, dear George," cries 'eart-broke Sally,
"I will be thy loving bride."
"No, you won't," says George, and promptly
Sticks the blade in 'er inside!

Wot a 'orrid scene of terror
For to see 'er lying stiff!
Wot a melancholy ending
To a lovers' casual tiff!

An' now 'e's riding in his carriage,
Passing laws in England's name,
While the victims of his passion
Creep away to 'ide their shame!

This sad and dramatic story—a veritable human document—went down with immense success. Perhaps, however, it was just as well that its hearers that evening did not include the club's clerical member.

When, after the death of Percy Wood, the Punch Bowl dissolved, some of the furniture found a home at the Savage Club.

CHAPTER VI

LADS OF THE VILLAGE

Poet and Poseur—Taking Second Opinion—Flowery Writing—Good Journalese—A Firm Friend—Testimonial Expert—Café Royalists—A Peculiar Publisher—Literary Infanticide—A Vanished Volume—Stage to Trenches.

1.

JUDGING from the average volume of reminiscences that has appeared any time within the last twenty years, it is impossible to produce such a book without giving the author's "personal recollections" of Oscar Wilde. It is, however, not really impossible at all. Any way, I am here striking a new note, and shall say very little about him. I did not know Wilde; and, so far from regretting it, am heartily glad of the fact. I only saw him once in my life, and the occasion is memorable as being one of the few when Wilde got distinctly the worst of a verbal encounter.

This is how the incident occurred.

It was a year or two before Wilde's dramatic downfall, but the air was already full of significant rumours concerning him. I was a schoolboy at the time, and had come up to London for the day. As

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I was walking along Piccadilly with a young barrister acquaintance, I noticed, as we came to Devonshire House, a curious figure approaching us. It was that of a big grossly-built man, dressed in the height of fashion (*circa*, 1894). Thus, he wore a glossy, bell-shaped silk hat, a long, black, and elaborately "frogged" overcoat with astrachan collar and cuffs, and striped trousers and patent leather boots, and carried a malacca cane with a tassel dangling from it in one white-gloved hand. The face was clean shaven, and almost leaden coloured, with heavy pouches under the eyes, and thick blubbery lips. Indeed, he rather resembled a fat white slug; and, even to my untutored eye, there was something curiously repulsive and unhealthy in his whole appearance.

"Who on earth is that horrid-looking fellow?" I enquired.

"Oh," returned my companion, who knew everybody by sight, "that's the great Oscar Wilde. I'm going to speak to him."

"Do you know him then?" I asked in astonishment.

"Certainly not," was the reply, "but that doesn't matter. Oscar loves being spoken to by strangers. Listen."

Thereupon my young friend went up to the other, who was now alongside us, raised his hat, and, adopting a mincing tone, addressed him as follows:—

"Pray, sir, would you be so good as to direct me to Curzon Street?"

Wilde stopped short, and, after running an ap-

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praising glance over my friend (who, for the point of this story, was, it should be remarked, a presentable enough youth), raised his hat in turn.

"I am pleased," he said, in a thick oily voice, "that I should be asked to direct you to so eminently desirable an address. Personally, I am unacquainted with any part of London east of the Albany. You will find Curzon Street to be the second on your right and then the first to the left. My compliments to you, sir."

"I am infinitely obliged to you," said my friend. Then, resuming his ordinary manner, he stopped a stranger just in front of us.

"Which is the way to Curzon Street, please?" he demanded briskly.

"Second to right, and first to left."

"Thanks," said my companion with a nod.

As we passed on, a look of suppressed fury swept across Wilde's face. Hurrying after us, he stopped my friend.

"Look here, sir," he burst out, dropping all his affectation, and for once in his life becoming natural, "a moment ago you asked me the way to Curzon Street, and now you ask somebody else. What the devil do you mean by it?"

"Oh," was the bland response, "I merely thought I would like to take a second opinion."

One up!

2.

I never saw Oscar Wilde again, but I happened, in after years, to see his brother Willie (as he always

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insisted on being called), several times, and had a nodding acquaintance with him. As a matter of fact, I was introduced to him at the Café Royal, and met him there fairly often. Still, I doubt if he knew me from the scores of other very young men who sat at his table and attempted (but unsuccessfully) to form a liking for absinthe any evening between 5 and 7 p. m.

Willie Wilde was a very different sort of man from Oscar. He was, however, extraordinarily like him in features, except for the fact that he wore a black beard. The story (probably quite untrue) is that Oscar, who was remarkably jealous and lived in terror lest they should be mistaken for one another, paid Willie £250 a year to wear a beard.

Although nothing approaching a genius, Willie Wilde was none the less a clever fellow, an amusing companion, and a good talker with occasional flashes of genuine wit. At the time of which I am speaking, he was understood to be on the staff of the *Daily Telegraph*. Anyway, he ought to have been, as he wrote Telegraphese admirably. Thus, to him, the sun was an "orb"; fire, the "devouring element"; and fishes, "finny denizens of the mighty deep," etc. He was, however, really a man of considerable literary taste, and, as such, had a wholesome contempt for the flowery sludge he was compelled to write. He would sometimes produce from his pocket the MS. of an article destined to be enshrined in the next morning's issue, and invite criticisms upon it from every one at his table.

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"Excellent," he would observe, as we sub-edited it between us. "An immense improvement, and all that. The trouble is, however, you haven't caught the knack."

Shortly before the date to which I am referring, Willie had married a wealthy American widow (or, possibly, divorcée—it is difficult to be absolutely correct in such matters). This was Mrs. Frank Leslie, with whom he had gone to New York. He did not, however, stop there very long, or even with his bride. The fact was, Willie discovered—and much to his annoyance—that the lady had no intention of supporting him in luxurious idleness, but actually expected him to work in the fiction factory she owned in Fifth Avenue. The shock to Willie's system was so great that he promptly packed his baggage and returned to England, leaving his newly made wife behind him.

"Take my word for it," he said to me when discussing his sad position, "the man who marries money jolly well earns it."

This was well put, and I liked the phrase quite as much when, years afterwards, I heard it again in a play at the Garrick.

3.

Oscar Wilde was a good (or, perhaps, it would be better to say a bad,) twenty years older than myself. Although, and as I have explained, I neither knew him nor wanted to, nor ever even spoke to him, I did happen to see something of his most intimate friend.

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This was Robert Ross, a loyal ally of this unhappy man, and one to whom his family must always be deeply indebted.

It was many years after the debacle that I came across Ross, and under quite unexpected circumstances. I was living at the time in Half Moon Street, occupying a modest top attic just large enough for myself and my cat. On the stairs or in the hall I often passed a quiet little bald-headed and middle-aged man, who had luxurious chambers on the first floor. I did not know who he was, and did not have sufficient curiosity to ask. One evening, however, we happened to meet on the doorstep, and he invited me into his sitting-room. As I sat down there, he began to talk in an extraordinarily interesting and fluent fashion of literature, music, art, and the theatre, on every one of which subjects he appeared to be remarkably well informed. When I said good-night, a couple of very pleasant hours had elapsed.

The next morning I asked the housemaid the name of my neighbour downstairs.

"Oh, that's Mr. Robert Ross," she said.

From time to time Ross repeated his invitation to drop into his room and have a chat with him. Whenever I did so, I certainly found him an extremely interesting companion, and always ready to discuss literature and art and music with sympathy and understanding. I never heard him so much as mention Oscar Wilde or any of that curious person's friends.

All sorts of people claim—and as if it were some-

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thing of which to be proud—to have known Oscar Wilde intimately. Before doing so, however, the majority of them have taken the precaution to wait until he was dead and buried, and thus not in a position to admit or deny their acquaintance. This is why we have had such a nauseous flood of “my reminiscences,” “my recollections,” and “my remembrances,” etc., of an individual about whom the less said (and written) the better.

All the same, certain people still in public life, who have produced books about him, undoubtedly did know Wilde as intimately as he ever permitted anybody to know him. Apart from Robert Ross (who died recently), and Alfred Douglas and Frank Harris, I fancy that Robert Harborough Sherard is, of those still living, the man who knew him best.

4.

Although I have lost sight of him lately, some years ago I used to see a good deal of Sherard. He was a wonderful person: A tall, fair-haired and blue-eyed man, exceptionally well informed, and possessed of a tremendous flow of conversation on any and every imaginable subject. The son of a clergyman named Kennedy, and a descendant of William Wordsworth, he had been educated at New College and in Germany. He was a clever journalist, but with very strong likes and dislikes. His dislikes, by the way, were reserved chiefly for Jews, to members of which ancient race I have heard him apply in public some remarkably terse and pithy utterances.

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As with most of us, Sherard had his ups and downs. At one period, when he seemed uncommonly affluent, he was reputed to be making a vast income by writing glowing testimonials in fulsome praise of somebody's cocoa, from which innocent beverage he gave the reading world to understand he derived inspiration for his well-known literary work. I doubt if he actually drove any commercial bargain. Still, I did see the testimonials. To anybody who knew Sherard, as his friends did, at the time he was writing them, the tales he unfolded therein were distinctly comic.

Sherard was a constant joy and surprise to his intimates. It was impossible to say what he would do next; but it was pretty certain to be something out of the common. He was, moreover, a singularly warm-hearted man, and always sympathized in a practical fashion with the down-and-outs of this world. I remember one evening he brought to a club, to which we both belonged, a miserable tramp whom he had picked up on the Embankment, and calmly proposed to make a collection for his benefit. When the members indignantly objected, Sherard did not hesitate to say exactly what he thought of them. It is also very much to his credit that, when anything but flourishing himself, he befriended Ernest Dowson, an admirable poet and a genius of somewhat misapplied talent, who was dying in a wretched and poverty-stricken hovel at Catford.

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5.

I look in at the Café Royal occasionally, more from habit than anything else, and not with any particular desire to revive old impressions. This, perhaps, is as well, for I doubt if I should get any. Somehow, the place seems very different from what it was even in the comparatively recent pre-war days. Of course, it is as crowded, and the dominoes turned over by alien fingers rattle as loudly as ever; the familiar newspaper stall still stands at the entrance; the swift moving throng of fat and thin waiters continue to perform Cinquevalli-like balancing feats between the close set tables; and the air remains as thick with the fumes of tobacco and as noisy with the hum of laughter and talk as at any time during the last twenty years.

Yet there are, none the less, subtle changes for the observant. The red velvet seats against the mirrored walls are still there—a trifle dingier, perhaps—but the people occupying them have certainly altered. It is quite another *clientèle* whom the place attracts nowadays. The gorgeous young women among them, all Batik and bangles, suggest “stars” of the cinema world; and the epicene young men with long hair and flowing ties, who once prattled unendingly of books and music and pictures to an accompaniment of caustic comment from Sherard & Co., are succeeded by massaged and manicured youths and smart actors in Mallaby-Deeleys. Anybody in a velveteen coat and baggy check trousers would probably cause a flicker-

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ing sneer. The very journalists look like private secretaries to M. P.'s; and Augustus John's beard is almost the only thing that even faintly reflects the dead days. Books and music and poetry and pictures no longer form the topic of heated discussion among the modern Café Royalists. The talk one hears nowadays is all of dance clubs and cinemas and aeroplanes.

Pale ghosts come out of the misty past, clamouring vainly for recognition. Richard le Gallienne, in knickerbockers and a jaunty straw hat, prattling amiably of threnodies, and the hirsute Frank Harris, holding a ready audience with a gushing torrent of talk, have not been in the place for years; and Willie Wilde, Lionel Johnson and John Davidson—and half a hundred others who were wont to foregather there every evening when this century was young—will never pass through the swing doors again.

Plus ça change, etc.? Perhaps. Still, I don't think so.

It was an uncommonly interesting group that assembled in the "domino room" when I first knew the place, and became (*pro tem.*) a Café Royalist myself. The most conspicuous figure among them was John Davidson, whom I met with Sherard. A curious career was his. As quite a young man he had hammered Latin and Greek into the thick skulls of small boys in a Scottish "academy" in far-away Perthshire. Removed from his native glens and wide, open spaces, he was not happy in London. His troubled spirit found an outlet in poetry. He wrote good poetry, too, but—and as his more distinguished

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countryman, Robert Buchanan, had discovered before him—very few people wanted it enough to pay for it. After a severe struggle, and against considerable odds, which he proudly concealed, circumstances proved too strong for him. In 1909, and at the comparatively early age of fifty-two, a coroner's jury returned their inevitable verdict upon the manner of his death.

Still, and despite the undoubted buffets he experienced, Davidson had a greater measure of Fortune's favours than some people. In especial, two distinct strokes of luck fell to him. One was that he had a poetic drama, in "For The Crown," produced at the Lyceum, with Forbes-Robertson and Mrs. Patrick Campbell playing the leading parts; and the other was that he drew a Civil List pension. Also, Davidson had—I will not say "enjoyed"—a distinctly longer lease of life than many of his fellow-workers in the field of Art and Letters. Thus, Charles Conder died at forty-one, Ernest Dowson at thirty-three, Henry Harland at forty-four, Lionel Johnson at thirty-five and Francis Thompson at forty-eight. They all died young, but I doubt if it were because the gods loved them.

There was, to my mind, one specially interesting member among the little group who foregathered at a certain table towards the far end of the mirrored room in those distant days. This was a lank, cadaverous individual, whose pockets were always bulging with dogs'-eared manuscripts, and whose talk was all about format and type and binding. I used to gaze upon him with reverential awe, marvelling that he

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received in such a spirit of gracious tolerance the gibes and jests and even vulgar horse-play of the ambitious young authors and poets and journalists sharing his table. Not a scrap of respect among the lot of them. The first time he borrowed half-a-crown from me, I felt tremendously honoured; the second time this happened I was not so sure of it; and the third time—well—I put it down to the eccentricity of genius, and let it go at that. Still, I should have been glad if he had studied a memory system.

My respect for this curious individual was due to the fact that he was a real publisher—the first I had ever seen—and thus far above mere editors. It is true that he was a very obscure—not to say furtive—publisher, and practised literary infanticide. Also, he had only gone into the business after failing lamentably as a music-hall comedian. A remarkable transition.

But there are some strange birds in the publishing world. Although I have not had over much to do with this sphere, I have, nevertheless, occasionally made tentative efforts to operate in it. Once, for example—and in a spirit of sheer devilment—I even wrote a novel. Forming the no doubt curious notion that it was not entirely unreadable, in a spirit of similar devilment, I sent it to a publisher. He did not, however, seem to know why I had done so, and certainly did not have the illbred curiosity to inquire.

Time passed—a whole lot of it. In fact, a year elapsed, and no word, one way or the other, came to me. As I am fairly good at taking a really plain

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hint, it then occurred to me that this particular firm did not happen to want the book. Accordingly (and after first dispatching two unanswered letters of inquiry on the subject), I sent a copy to another firm. This was that of William Heinemann, by which it was very promptly accepted, and duly set before the lovers of good literature. About three months afterwards I received a letter from publisher Number One, expressing a most flattering opinion of this volume, and winding up with the remark that "if I had another book as good as this one, he would be delighted to bring it out," etc.

Thereupon, I wrote back to the worthy fellow, saying that I was glad to hear that he liked the book, but that it was not really a better than the copy of it which he had had for fifteen months, and which—as it had not yet been returned to me—was presumably still in his possession. This solitary effort at polite letter writing, however, apparently exhausted him, for he did not answer. Nor, incidentally, did he return the manuscript, thus leaving me to infer that it was still receiving that "prompt and careful consideration" which he advertised was invariably accorded to all books submitted to him by aspiring authors. However, I am not unreasonable, and, as he has only had it a matter of ten years or so, I don't like to press him. Publishers, I know from experience, hate being hurried.

All the same, I should rather like to know where the manuscript is. Of course the explanation that seems most probable is that it was lost in the post

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when I sent it. But this theory falls down when I point out that, to save expense, I delivered it myself, and still hold the firm's receipt.

I can offer an alternative theory. I don't say there is anything in it. You must form your own judgment. The other day I was in the British Museum, and noticed a considerable crowd in a room on the right of the entrance hall. Having a curious disposition, I spoke to a policeman.

"What room is this?" I inquired, "and what are all these people looking at?"

"This is the Rare and Valuable MS. Department," he answered, "and these people are looking at the latest acquisitions."

I merely throw out the suggestion, but it is just possible that the original of my "Four Times Foiled" is among these treasures. Any way, in moments of pronounced optimism, I like to imagine it is. But I am too diffident to go and investigate.

6.

Of course the war made a great change in the Café Royal frequenters, and has accounted for the absence of many of those one used to see there night after night and as regularly as clockwork. Some, too, who went to France and Belgium and Gallipoli are staying there, and these will never pass through the familiar swing doors again.

Such gaps among the habitués conjure up a memory that often comes back to me. In the dreadful

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winter of 1914, at a tiny Belgian hamlet not a thousand kilometres from shell-torn Ypres, I saw among the pathetic little wooden crosses in a roadside field one bearing a name I knew. It was that of an actor who used to drop into the Café Royal every evening before going on to the theatre. He drew £30 a week at the Gaiety, and was quite well known to the public. In August of 1914 he was fifty years of age. In September he was a private soldier in the mud and blood of the trenches; and in October an enemy's bullet had found him.

He was a very bad actor, certainly, but he was possessed of a very gallant spirit. Fifty, and dying for England, while a pack of crimped-haired young mummers and journalists half his age were stopping snugly in London, and bellowing about the "necessity" of "keeping the home fires burning" and "business as usual" and all the other nauseous and cowardly apothegms of which they were so enamoured.

I can still see that little wooden cross on that shell-swept roadside!

CHAPTER VII

POT-POURRI

"Orders" in Demand—Dilettanti Debating—Bung and Bohemianism—
The Retort Courteous—A "Best Seller"—"Racy, but Not
Dangerous"—Unidentified Diner—Editorial Caution—Literary
Values.

1.

A REMARKABLE coterie to which I once belonged was the "After Dinner" Club. There was a good enough idea behind it, viz., to meet at monthly intervals for music and conversation "after dinner." Hence the name. Still, it was not really a club at all in the generally accepted sense of the term, as it had no premises of its own, but assembled on stated occasions in rooms hired for the purpose. The "A.D.C." was in reality a society, and had a considerable membership, so far as went mere numbers. I do not, however, know that they counted for very much on the scroll of Fame; and the collection of actors, artists, authors, journalists, musicians, and poets, whom one met at its different gatherings were scarcely in the first flight. Still, this, to my mind, only made them the more interesting. Candidly I prefer the Nobodies. This is why these chapters are mainly about them.

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In the official notification of the first "evening" I attended, I was rather struck by a line from the secretary:—"the wearing of Orders by members is requested." This put me in a bit of a difficulty, for, and as a brand new member, I felt it incumbent upon me to observe the rules to the letter. Accordingly I wrote to the secretary explaining that the only "order" I possessed was one signed by Arthur Collins and marked, "admit two to pit of Drury Lane Theatre." Should I wear this, I enquired. Time passed—a lot of it—but brought with it no answer. Hence, and to be on the safe side, when the eventful evening arrived, I put the Collins communiqué in my pocket and set off for the function, to which, by the way, I went with Charles Garvice.

I was glad I went, for it was really a most thrilling evening. A company-promoting peer officiated as "host," assisted by a dazzling light of the musical comedy world as "hostess." There must have been three or four hundred people present, and most of them had responded nobly to the secretarial request to wear "orders." Thus, much to my envy, William Le Queux exhibited at least a dozen, and a lady whom I had last seen intrepidly handing out buns to soldiers in a Y.M.C.A. hut at Boulogne wore a Mons star. The secretary himself displayed an O.B.E. and even the Boy Scout, hired for the evening to bellow "Gent's cloaks on the right," had two rows of ribands. I think Garvice and myself were the only two of our sex undecorated. I half thought of telephoning to Clarkson to see what he could do in the matter, but

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it was too late then, as it was after eight o'clock, and his shop was shut. However, the genial Douglas Sladen, who is always very much to the front at such gatherings (and who happened to be on the committee) came to the rescue and soon put us at our ease.

The "A.D.C." had a most imposing committee-list. Anybody who was anybody at all in the artistic, literary, musical, and theatrical worlds seemed to serve on it, or at any rate to be at least a "patron." Mrs. St. Leger Harrison and Mrs. Kendal represented literature and the drama, and Madame Clara Butt music; and the long list of "patrons" included Lady Alexander, Lady Stanley, Hall Caine, Conan Doyle, Anthony Hope Hawkins, Henry Arthur Jones, and Gilbert Parker, etc. The list of ordinary members included some also-rans, certainly, but taking it all round, it read like an extract from a cunningly interwoven mixture of "Debrett" and "Who's Who." Altogether, and as an impressed reporter on an evening paper remarked to me, a "select" assemblage.

Another society, but of a distinctly different class, to which I also belonged, was the "Dilettanti." This was really a small dining and debating club, the idea being that, after dinner, somebody should read a paper on some matter of topical interest, followed by a discussion. We had no very big guns among us (nor did we angle for them), but every member, whether man or woman, was required to be a genuine worker in art or literature, etc. We also had a politician or two among us, notably Ronald McNeill,

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M.P. for Canterbury, and a great power in debate. The backbone of the "Dilettanti" was Sidney Pater-noster (who has a lot to do with *Truth*), assisted by his wife, and the members included Mrs. Frankau (better known as "Frank Danby," and the mother of Gilbert Frankau), Jerome K. Jerome, Edgar Jepson (who now writes a great deal for the "screen"), and others of similar quality. Our monthly dinners were considered, and with good reason, quite pleasant functions, and guests who were a little out of the common were always glad to attend them. I remember taking Somerset Maugham to one of these gatherings, much to the uneasiness of the committee who fancied they thereby ran a risk of being "pilloried" in one of his subsequent comedies. There was no risk, as I told them, for when Maugham wanted "types" he knew very well where to go for them.

2.

At this period I used to be taken fairly often to the Savage Club by a member of the *Sketch* staff. It was a curious place in those days, run much on the easy-going lines of the Press Club, but a distinct cut above it.

The Savage Club has one very sound rule, viz., that a candidate for membership joins on a month's probation, during which period he is required to frequent the premises. This enables the committee to take his measure, so to speak, and decide if he suits the club or doesn't. Also, it gives the prospective member

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an opportunity of discovering if the club suits him before he has put down the necessary entrance fee and first year's subscription. In none of the clubs I have joined—and I have joined dozens—is such an eminently sensible safeguard observed. The result is twofold. One is that the club is apt to get saddled with undesirables, and the other is that a new member may discover very soon (but still too late to be any use) that he has made a bad choice. The reason he doesn't then resign is that such a course would mean that his entrance fee has been wasted. When this amounts, as it does in a really good club, to thirty or forty guineas, the average man thinks more than twice about withdrawing until he has had something approaching his money's worth. This explains why so many members grumble bitterly, but continue to hang on year after year.

The Savage has always prided itself on its "Bohemianism." I don't know what "Bohemianism" is exactly, but it seems to be inseparably connected with Bung. This, no doubt, is the reason why a bar was (and still is) a feature of the place. Still, it certainly appears to make for friendship among the members; and I understand that one can say "good evening" to a man there without first having been formally introduced to him—which is more than one can do at the average club.

Twenty years ago the "show" member of the Savage was a remarkable old gentleman, Odell by name. As I understand that he is still to be seen there, he must now be about ninety at least. Nobody, how-

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ever, knew his real age, for he was always a little sensitive on this point. He was regarded as the "father" of the club, and new members on joining were presented to him with great ceremony. I wish it were possible to relate Odell's remark when one such member who had a somewhat—well—unfortunate patronymic was introduced to him, but, alas, it is not possible. There are many stories about him, and the same drawback attaches to most of them.

Odell had started life—somewhere in the dark ages—as an actor, and he always contrived to look the typical mummer of the "old school." With his tightly buttoned frock coat, flowing locks, and slouch hat complete, he "dressed the part," too, and could never have been mistaken for anything else. He was an extraordinarily amusing fellow, and possessed of a pretty and a caustic wit. Another of his accomplishments was an ability to recite, without incurring the risk of having bricks heaved at him; and for long years on end no Saturday night dinner at the club was considered complete that did not finish up with him "saying his piece."

Thanks to the good offices of influential friends, Odell has recently found a haven in the Charterhouse, where he lives very comfortably as a "Poor Brother." This excellent institution (and in which I hope to have the good luck to end my own pilgrimage) is not hide-bound by routine. Still, certain rules designed for the benefit of the inmates as a whole have to be observed there. Yet, light as are these restrictions, Odell—who objects on principle to any restric-

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tions at all—apparently found them a little irksome. Anyway, the story goes that, shortly after his arrival, the Master sent for him and handed him a little book.

“I should be very glad, Mr. Odell,” he said apologetically, “if you would be good enough to look at this sometime. It contains the rules of the Charter-house. Possibly you are not yet familiar with them.”

Odell bowed politely, adjusted his spectacles, and slowly turned over the pages. Then, with a charming smile, he handed the volume back to the Master.

“These certainly appear to be the rules, sir,” he observed blandly. “Very good rules, too, in my opinion. I think I may fairly claim that I have broken every one of them!”

3.

Charles Garvice, whom I mentioned just now, and who died a couple of years ago, was really a most remarkable man. Also, he was certainly something of a phenomenon in the literary world—or what passes for it in the loose way of talking that prevails nowadays. As a matter of fact, he was not in the literary world at all, but in the writing one—which is a very different place. Starting from behind the counter in a City bookshop, he rose by a combination of hard work, opportunity (plus a readiness to recognize and seize it), pronounced business acumen, and a real gift of story-telling, to the proud position of a “best seller.” Literary men laughed at his books and at his methods, but they were consumed with envy at his enormous sales and the big prices he

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commanded. They were really big prices, too, for, after spending money freely for years on end, he managed to leave upwards of £70,000, which takes some doing.

It was, however, only within the last decade or so that Garvice really made any substantial income. Before the "Garvice boom" (which did not commence until about 1908 at the earliest), his prices were extremely moderate. I know something about this, as I myself happen to have written several short stories in collaboration with him, the agreement between us being to share and share alike the proceeds. For the first of these stories, which appeared in one of the Harmsworth organs, the cheque came to £3 3s. For the next six, however, the price was advanced to £12 12s. each. I merely mention this to show that people who glibly asserted that Garvice made huge sums from the very start were talking nonsense. The fact is, for the first twenty-five years of his career his income was very moderate indeed.

After these initial efforts of mine I did not write any more short stories with Garvice. There was no reason why I should have done so, for when he found that his "stock" had risen, he quite naturally decided that further collaboration was unnecessary. Before long he also captured the American market, where they simply ate anything he chose to give them.

There are two main reasons why Garvice managed to leave the considerable amount he did. The first is that he had been writing for a very much longer period than most people imagine. As a matter of

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fact, he was writing hard for nearly fifty years. The other reason is that he was in no sense extravagant. He lived comfortably, but modestly. Beyond the Garrick, which he did not join until a year or two before his death, he belonged to no first-class club, and a motor was a very late purchase in his life. He never played cards, or endeavoured to pick out winners on the Turf, and his Stock Exchange transactions were not conducted on a scale that could have profited his brokers to any pronounced degree. Nor did he ever keep up a big establishment. At one time he had a small farm in North Devon, where I have stayed with him, and when he sold it he moved to a modest house at Richmond.

Although always a remarkably cheery and genial soul, Garvice, nevertheless (and like most of us), had a secret grief. This was that the people who counted—and whose good opinion he wanted—steadily refused to take him seriously. They envied him his vast circulation, and would have given their little fingers to have secured a fraction of it for themselves, but they laughed at his work. Reviewing one of his novels, entitled “The Outcast of the Family,” a rude fellow (probably a disappointed hack) wrote in a leading paper, “This ought to be called ‘The Outcast of the *Family Herald*’.” Poor Garvice was much upset. There was reason for his annoyance too, as the *Family Herald* public was just the public to which he really appealed. Apart from this consideration the implied suggestion that to write for the *Family Herald* is disreputable was un-

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warranted. As a matter of fact, I have written for it myself. So has Grant Allen, and so have a great many quite well-known people. Most of Garvice's work, however, appeared in a rival organ (and which he afterwards owned), *The Family Reader*. I once wrote a serial in this, the editorial instructions being to make it "racy, but not dangerous."

This was the key-note of Garvice's work, and the secret of his immense popularity. The fact is, there is a vast public for stories that are "racy, but not dangerous," and I only wish I could cater to it. But it is a gift, and has been denied me.

Garvice was extraordinarily faithful to his public, and his public were extraordinarily faithful to him. So they ought to have been, too, for he gave them just the sort of stuff they wanted and never disappointed them. All his novels—and he wrote nearly a hundred—were exactly the same, so far as went plot and characters. Thus there would always be a wicked lord—or at any rate a baronet—whose intentions towards the virtuous village maiden would be strictly dishonourable, a high-souled and deeply wronged hero, a devoted family retainer, and a mystery about a will. The moral, however, was always strongly pointed, and the wedding bells invariably rang out in the last chapter. A will, however, was his forte, and it seemed to be his settled conviction that (and as Jerome has somewhere observed is demanded by Stage law) if a character dies without

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making one, the property automatically goes to the nearest villain.

An amiable weakness for titles was one of Garvice's characteristics. He sprinkled his pages with peers and peeresses, and seldom mentioned anybody under the status of a baronet's cousin. As he grew older he carried this harmless idiosyncrasy into his private life, and his conversation simply bristled with the names of the mighty. "My friend, Lord —— was telling me," or, "As I said yesterday to Sir John ——" was the sort of thing always on his lips.

At one time we both happened to be members of a certain club which made a great specialty of inviting people of more or less distinction to dine there. The committee, however, laboured under the impression that only people vouched for by Messrs. Burke and Debrett were really distinguished, and the club's hospitality was accordingly mainly reserved for these. One evening our "guest of honour" was a brand-new peer. As often happens on such occasions none of the committee had ever seen this person, and Garvice, who was chairman, was equally unacquainted with him. "Somehow, we haven't met," was the naïve way he put it.

Presently while we were waiting, an apparent stranger walked into the room. Instantly Garvice went up and shook him warmly by the hand.

"How are you, my dear Lord Buggins?"—or Huggins, or whatever the expected guest's name was—he said effusively. "Very good indeed of you to honour us like this."

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"Thank you," returned the other, disengaging himself, "but I'm not Lord Buggins."

"Then who on earth are you?" demanded Garvice, looking, for the first time in his life, nonplussed. "What are you doing here?"

"Well, I happen to be a member," was the mild response.

Fortunately the eagerly awaited guest arrived the next moment, and the critical situation was saved.

Garvice's age was always a mystery, even to those who knew him well, and when, on his death, it became known that he was in his seventieth year most people were immensely surprised. The fact is, he scarcely looked fifty, for he had an extraordinary young and buoyant manner, and a well set-up figure. He was extremely popular and good-hearted, and although people laughed at him because he took his books so seriously, he had hosts of friends. He was the least envious of other authors himself, and I think he was genuinely pleased when a "literary man" (as he charitably considered the minor novelists and pushing journalists who forced their way into the periodical "honours" list) was knighted. If he had not been such a staunch Conservative he could scarcely have avoided receiving the accolade himself.

It is rather a blow to our opinion (when we have any) of our own importance to find how little this is apt to be estimated by those in a position to pass judgment upon it. Thus, the day after Charles Garvice died, a friend, anxious to pay tribute to his memory, hurried off hot-foot to the Northcliffe Press

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(for which, by the way, Garvice had often written) and proposed to supply a column of personal reminiscences. The editor, a Scotsman, whom he saw there, controlled a Sunday organ of vast circulation. He appeared sympathetic to the suggestion, but before any precise bargain was concluded his native caution asserted itself.

"Let me see," he remarked reflectively; "when did you say yon Gar-r-vice man died?"

"Last night."

"Aye, last nicht. A sad loss. We-el, I'm thinking we'll no' touch it."

"But why not? You've just said he was a great man."

"Aye, he was that richt enough. But, you see, he passed away on Monday. This is Tuesday. We go to press on Saturday, and come out on Sunday. He'll be forgotten by then."

I think, however, that this expert was wrong in his unflattering estimate. Garvice was certainly remembered for a good deal longer than the Sunday following his death. As a matter of fact, when somebody took upon himself to enquire in a certain "literary" weekly, "Who was Charles Garvice?" scores of people rushed in to answer the question. I do not fancy, however, that they did his memory any particular service by the extravagant claims they advanced as to the position he occupied in authorship.

But then the average person so seldom has any sense of literary values.

CHAPTER VIII

FLARE OF THE FOOTLIGHTS

The Theatre at First Hand—Mrs. Langtry in Management—Playtinkering—Critics and Criticism—Mummers and Manners—Angry Actors—Tree in "Variety"—The "Two Smacks."

1.

I HAVE always been interested in the Theatre as an institution. In fact, so much so that, rather than see no play at all, I would see a bad one. Most of those that I do see are certainly of this description. It is obvious, therefore, that theatrical managers as a class either do not know their business, or else that their business is such that it cannot be learned.

Personally, I think the former is the case. To tell a good play by merely reading it is, I admit, very difficult. It is, however, very easy to tell a bad one. Also, managers have the further advantage of seeing a play at rehearsal. When, therefore, they persistently produce, as is their annoying habit, one piece of rubbish after another, the inevitable conclusion is that they do not know their business. But instead of candidly admitting this they lose their tempers and blame the public. The public, as it happens, have

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far more sense than the managers credit them with having. A poor play, I know, sometimes—but very rarely—succeeds beyond its merits, but I have never known a good one to fail. Plays fail because they are bad, and for no other reason. That is the trouble. In managerial vocabularies, however, there is no such thing as a failure. When they have one they call it an “artistic success” and the public a “pack of fools.”

Wanting, some time ago, to write something about the Theatre, I thought it would be a sound plan to get a little practical knowledge of the subject first. A departure from precedent, I know. Still, my way. Accordingly, I penetrated into the business. The side I deliberately selected was the managerial one, as this would take me much further behind the scenes than any other. After all, the average actor knows precious little about any play beyond the one in which he happens to be appearing at the moment, and precious little about any part in it except his own.

Apropos, I once asked an actor to describe the plot of Hamlet.

“I don’t know it,” he said. “I have only played Polonius.”

2.

My first incursion into the curious realms of stage-land was under the ægis of Mrs. Langtry. She was then managing the Imperial, which fine theatre, it will be remembered, subsequently “got religion” and became transformed into the G. H. Q. of Wesleyanism.

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While going over the building with her we came to a door marked **PUSH** in big letters.

"A very important word," she said. "Never forget it while you're on my staff. It's not 'push and go,' but it's 'go' if you don't 'push'."

A sound principle.

Mrs. Langtry was, when she had a proper medium for her talent, a very much better actress than most people credited her with being. Unfortunately, however, she seldom had a suitable medium, and was expected to make bricks with a very small amount of dramatic straw. One piece of pretentious and foolish clap-trap, and for which she paid far too much money, was handed over to me to alter and repair. After I had had a go at it (but without much result) George Hawtrey, who was a member of the company, tried his more expert hand. A brother of Charles Hawtrey, he was a sound actor, and a very fair dramatist himself. Indeed, he always said that he really wrote his brother's great success, "A Messenger from Mars." Robert Ganthony, however, whose name appeared on the bills as author had another opinion on this subject.

Although—and following the accepted practice—he cut out all my "improvements," even George Hawtrey's cleverness did not suffice to turn an intrinsically bad play into a good one. A third expert—the original author was, as will be gathered, remarkably compliant to permit this cobbling with his work—was accordingly called in and given the job. He disposed of it by summarily scrapping Hawtrey's alterations

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and substituting an entirely fresh set of his own. What the piece was like in the end can only be imagined. The end, however, came very soon—as a matter of fact, in a week.

Among others of greater or lesser importance, the Imperial Theatre Company included Mabel Beardsley (a sister of Aubrey Beardsley), and the leading man was Lewis Waller. A good actor in “costume” parts (except for his habit of mistaking a Hall Caine rôle for a Shakespearean one), he had a tremendous “following.” Enthusiastic admirers used to line up two deep outside the stage door to see him enter and leave the theatre. As Mrs. Langtry said to me, it would have been more to the point if they had also lined up at the box-office to see him inside the theatre. Unfortunately, they didn’t.

Mrs. Langtry was extremely popular with the whole of her company, and also with her business staff. Good-hearted, generous, and utterly devoid of petty jealousies, she was further remarkable for not standing unduly on her dignity. This was a somewhat rare trait among actors and actresses of her acknowledged position. I remember once, when I was getting together a touring company, asking a very average individual who wanted an engagement his idea of terms. His modest demand was “Fifty pounds a week and a dressing-room to myself.” As my idea was that he should also have a theatre to himself, his services were not secured.

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3.

Among my manifold duties at the Imperial was that of sending out first-night seats to the Press. This was a delicate job, and apparently required more tact than belonged to me. Anyway, I once—and purely out of kindness of heart—forwarded a dress-circle ticket to a quite unimportant weekly paper. The editor returned it the next morning, accompanied by a furiously indignant letter to the effect that his dramatic critic was not accustomed to sitting in the dress-circle, and demanding “accommodation in accordance with his position.” I wrote back expressing suitable regret that all the pit and gallery seats had already been allotted. Oddly enough, however, this did not smooth over matters.

But dramatic critics as a class are a difficult set of people. I understand that a number of them are banded together into an organization known as the “Critics’ Circle.” The other day this august body met in solemn conclave to discuss—not, as might be thought, the best means of securing and preserving the independence of critics, or the improvement of the Drama, or something of equal importance—but the problem whether critics should, or should not, accept drinks from managers. I am not sure how the matter was settled eventually, but I heard that those who adopted the standpoint that the practice was—to put it mildly—open to question, lost the day. Still, dramatic critics are extraordinarily simple minded, and I should not be in the least astonished to learn that they really imagine that theatrical managers supply

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them with whisky and soda on first nights merely for the sake of their "beautiful eyes."

I don't think dramatic critics have much of a time. It must be wearisome work to have to sit out and pass considered judgment upon anything and everything that is put before them. Yet everybody wants to be one of the band. I have never understood the system on which such posts are allotted. Once, however, when I was writing for a defunct organ, the dramatic critic's billet suddenly fell vacant. I applied for it. So did the entire staff down to the office boy's understudy. Thereupon the proprietor called us together and announced that the coveted appointment would be given to "whoever had the best dress suit."

Some of the "criticisms" I read nowadays make me wonder if this system still prevails.

Theatrical critics as a class are not exactly *personae gratae* to the average manager. There is no reason why they should be. Rather the reverse, in fact, for the critic is really a sort of super-policeman, whose business it is to protect the interests of the playgoing public; and as these interests frequently clash with those of the managers, there is practically bound to be a certain amount of discord, or, at best, only an armed neutrality.

But managers—especially actor-managers—who don't see eye to eye with them, are often under the remarkable impression that a critic who fails to commend them is neglecting his duty. Both Arthur Bourchier and Oscar Asche have several times broken a lance with the fraternity, and Charles Cochran has

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also, and in good set terms complained of the "malignant criticism" accorded his ambitious productions. One of the charges he brings against these experts is that, writing of a recent effort of his to improve public taste, a corrupt fellow among them declared that a leading member of the company, a "singing duck," as it happened, had been, "hissed off the stage" on the first night of his last revue. I am with the entrepreneur in his grievance here, for the allegation is quite unfounded. I was there myself, and am prepared to make an affidavit that this talented artiste was heartily encored for her quack solo.

The Press notices of this item in the programme were, I fear, inspired by professional jealousy. I don't think the Actor's Association were concerned, but a cloud of suspicion certainly rests on a small clique of unemployed Opera singers who were observed in the pit and gallery. The matter wants clearing up. If I know anything of Cochran he will not rest until he has done so.

All the same, it is a mistake to quarrel with the critics. They invariably have the last word, and this is the one that counts most.

Except in a very few instances, I cannot see that theatrical folk have much to complain of in their treatment at the hands of the critics, for taking them all round, these latter are simply overflowing with the milk of human kindness, and habitually pour out the most fulsome adulation on everything and everybody. In many papers, indeed, it is almost as much as the critic's life (or at any rate the tenure of his job) is

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worth to hint even mildly that somebody is giving a bad performance in an inferior play. Perhaps theatrical folk are supersensitive, but every now and again I come across paragraphs on the contents' bills, "Famous Actor Sues Well Known Critic." Although I have probably never heard of any of the parties, I always read these accounts, if only to see for my own information how far one may go without incurring proceedings for libel. There appears, however, to be no definite standard. Thus I have found the phrase, "gave an inadequate performance," followed by a writ; while another member of the same company has taken as a high compliment the recorded view that he "acted like a tramp with the colic."

The critics of the concert platform, however, are, taken as a class, even less up to their work than are their comrades of the theatre. To them every musical goose is a swan, and the word *virtuoso* is kept standing in type, as it is bound to be wanted several times per column. It is a horrid thought, but is there any connection between the advertisement pages and the "critical" paragraphs? If there isn't, why not sometimes point out that Mr. Ivory-Thumper should practise his scales before appearing in public; or that Miss Bigge-Bellows should really take a few lessons in voice production?

Still, while I am all for imparting a little much-needed vigour into dramatic and musical criticism, it can be pushed to extremes. Consider, for instance, the Saul method of dealing with an unsatisfactory orchestral performance: "Saul threw a javelin at the

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harper.” Sound, this, but perhaps going just a little too far.

People (chiefly disappointed dramatists) who declare that critics are “no use” are wrong. As a matter of fact, they discharge a very useful function. Without their expert assistance, indeed, how would one know if one had really enjoyed a play or not? All sorts of mistakes would be made by amateur members of the audience. Yet I think the fraternity would still further increase their value if on the fall of the curtain they would, through a selected mouth-piece—say the polyphonic A. B. Walkeley, or the esoterically opinioned E. A. Baughan—announce the decision at which they had arrived. The practical result then would be that ordinary untutored individuals like myself, who bulk among first-night audiences, would—instead of having to wait for guidance until the next morning—know at once if the piece we have just seen pleases us, or doesn’t. Should we (as some of us do) pin our faith to a Sunday pilot, we have, under the present conditions, to wait even longer. The suspense is an unfair tax upon us.

Candidly, I am not over fond of actors, and I rather doubt if, as a class, they are over fond of me. Still, I always admire the way they stand up for themselves when any rude fellow like myself hints that they are not all great and good and gifted beyond the remainder of the community.

Thus I once happened to write something about them in the *Evening Standard*. Personally—it just shows how one can be mistaken—I thought it almost

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fulsome. Fred Terry, however, took it very much amiss, and delivered a vigorous (although curiously reasoned) onslaught in the next issue, demanding my head on a charger at least. He seemed quite peevish when he didn't get it. Then on another occasion I wrote a little book, in which appeared certain references to stage-folk as I had encountered them at first hand. In this I quite thought I had poured out honey and balm on any wounds previously and unwittingly inflicted. But again I was clearly wrong, for a stern critic in the *Stage* or *Era* (probably in both) characterized it as "written in the worst possible taste, and a cruel libel on the public's loyal and devoted servants."

So far as I can see, however, actors themselves have not always an over-flattering opinion of their own comrades, and can be very severe about one another. In this connection an ancient tale (still in general use) recounts how an elderly mummer once stalked into a Bodega and gazed at a poster of Forbes-Robertson as Hamlet.

After a moment's contemplative silence he turned to his companion.

"'Im showing as 'Amlet!" he observed scornfully. "What next? You should 'ave seen *my* 'Amlet. They still talk of it at Salisbury. Lord, what a production! The cast:—'Is Melancholy Nibs, your 'umble servant; Ophelia, the lady I was living with at the time, but whose name I dis-remember; and the Ghost, Mr. Forbes-blooming-Robinson. Rotten! Thank you, laddie, I will 'ave another."

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As will be gathered, members of the stage world—like other people—sometimes have their little differences of opinion among themselves. Occasionally this leads to a happy interchange of pleasantries. Thus it is said that a certain manager when writing to a certain distinguished actress (and with whom at the moment he was not on the best of terms) began his letter “Dear Miss —— (the ‘dear’ is purely conventional) I should be glad if,” etc. Thereupon the other wrote back, signing herself “Yours sincerely,” and then added “P.S. the ‘Yours sincerely’ is purely theatrical.”

It is all very well for the theatrical journals to protest loudly that actors and actresses are “the public’s loyal and devoted servants,” etc. The truth is, actors and actresses as a class sometimes forget that they are the public’s servants, and labour under the curious idea that they are really their masters and mistresses. This is why they do not hesitate to call them sharply to order when referred to in terms they consider unflattering (“unfair” is the word they generally use), and resent any sort of criticism that is not fulsomely laudatory.

For an actor or actress to indulge in “back chat” with the audience is a dangerous game, and the people behind the footlights nearly always get the worst of it. I have seen two such instances. The first was one where Mrs. Lewis Waller happened to be concerned. The piece was deadly dull, and as it dragged its dreary length, a man sitting beside me seemed to get so bored that he pulled out an evening paper and be-

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gan to read the football news. It was severe criticism, but not, I think, unfounded. Mrs. Waller, however, appeared to be very much annoyed. "Drying up" suddenly in the flood of fustian she was declaiming, she roundly reproved the offender in set terms for his "ungentlemanly conduct," and vehemently asserted that it "spoiled her acting." Not in the least abashed by this outburst, the object of her wrath calmly (but rudely) replied that he would be only too glad to stop reading if his doing so would have the result of in any way improving the lady's performance.

The second instance of this sort of thing occurred at the theatre where both the late George Grossmith and his son were performing. It was a really terrible piece—quite the worst I have ever sat through—and was called for some inexplicable reason "The Gay Pretenders." Neither "Gee-Gee" nor his son, however, were in the least "gay," and the audience watching their antics were positively sad.

After the dreary rubbish had been going on for an hour, and without showing any sign of improvement, the occupants of the gallery grew a little restive. Thereupon Grossmith senior, who, like all actors, bitterly resented any demonstration not entirely favourable to himself, lost his temper. What was worse, he showed it.

"You're very funny up there," he called out angrily.

"More than you are down there, then, guv'nor!" came the reply.

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As might have been expected, the audience's sympathies went to the gallery.

4.

I suppose I am one of the few people who have had any sort of connection with the literary and dramatic worlds and do not claim to have known Tree intimately. I saw him, of course, repeatedly, on the stage in the theatre, and still on the stage outside the theatre. He was always on one or the other. I could have improved the acquaintance if I had wanted to, for it happened that, through Henry Dana, he offered me a position in his entourage. After, however, a few interviews which he kept (and a much larger number which he didn't), I let the opportunity slip. Dana subsequently told me that it took Tree quite a long time to get over his astonishment.

"But I engaged the fellow!" he protested. "Or, if I didn't, I meant to. Never heard of such impudence!"

That was Tree all over, a mixture of vagueness and pose.

There are countless stories about Tree. Most of them, however, merely represent him as a tiresome mountebank, while others have been so assiduously serialized by his army of tame Press agents that they will not bear repeating. As a rule, Tree's wit was remarkably laboured, and had to be led up to and carefully rehearsed. Still, occasionally he got off something that was both spontaneous and really good. A sound critic, too, his epigrammatic description of

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a certain "spectacular" piece as more "navel than millinery" was well put, and "gilded hog-wash" was his considered opinion of a brother histrion's efforts to shine as a dramatist.

Perhaps the occasion when he had his best flash of spontaneous humour occurred during his debut in "variety." Accompanied by Lady Tree, he had gone down to the Palace Theatre to rehearse a sketch. As he wandered about the unfamiliar stage, feeling very bored and looking like a fish out of water, a couple of "knockabout" comedians, who had just finished their "turn," approached him.

"Well met, Sir 'Erb!" exclaimed the first one, slapping him heartily on the back. "Glad to welcome you 'ere."

"Oh, delighted," murmured Tree vaguely, and not quite sure if the affable stranger were not Sir Alfred Butt himself.

"This is my mate, 'Arry," continued the other, beckoning to his partner.

"Pleased to meet you," declared the second comedian, delivering an equally vigorous slap on Tree's shoulder. "Welcome to the 'alls. The missus showing with you?"

With a magnificent gesture, Tree signalled to his wife.

"Maud," he said, "allow me to introduce my new friends. Lady Tree—the Two Smacks!"

CHAPTER IX

MUMMERS AND MANNERS

Passing of the Imperial—Return of Willard—Chilling Reception—Provincial Tour—Finance and the Footlights—Temper and Temperament—"Harvey's Sauce"—Vaulting Ambition—Mistaken Identity—Irving at Home.

1.

WHEN I was with her, I think everybody in London (and most of those in the country) wanted to write a play for Mrs. Langtry. A vast number of them attempted to do so, too. It was my unhappy job to read some of these efforts. With regard to many of them, I really thought that Colney Hatch had been let loose. As a matter of fact, two such offerings did emanate from a "Home of Rest for the Feeble-Minded." One play, however, was eventually produced, although I felt bound to advise against it. Still, I was in the minority, and everybody else whom Mrs. Langtry consulted—and she always took several opinions (when her own was really much the best)—declared it a "find." This was a collaboration, and the authors, Sir Henry Norman and Barrie Pain, elected to be anonymous. Here they showed their wisdom, for the bantling's life was short and not

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exactly merry. Mrs. Langtry did not appear in it herself. Lewis Waller, however, did his best, and somebody else in the cast did his worst.

When Mrs. Langtry had had enough of the Imperial, and on which she had spent a great deal of money, she wisely went off to America, where she soon recouped her losses. I fancy she made more out of Sydney Grundy's "The Degenerates" than out of anything else in her repertoire.

Sometimes in these days I wander down to Westminster for old sake's sake, and have a look at what was once the Imperial Theatre. Nothing of it, however, is now left; and in its place stands a vast pile, full of whiskered Wesleyans, who direct the affairs of their Society from this address. With the Aquarium (which is but a memory to the modern Londoner, also scrapped), the whole district is now completely purged of its former theatrical associations.

But I don't know that it is vastly improved.

2.

A name which loomed very large in the theatrical world of London a good many years ago—almost before I was born or thought of—was that of E. S. Willard. Starting off as the poor, but honest, hero of various touring companies, he presently found his métier as a "gentleman crook" in all the most popular melodramas of the eighties. Scorning accepted convention, he played the part on brand-new lines, and was regarded as the very last word in stage "villainy."

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As such, he deservedly became an immense success. Then, sighing for fresh fields to conquer, he shook himself free of the stultifying rut of melodramatic clap-trap to which his admirers had condemned him (thereby doing him, as is their way, a distinct dis-service), and went off to America.

In the States, where he stopped for some years, Willard did not repeat his London success. He did something much better—he made a fresh one. Before long he was a effulgent star of the first magnitude, and with a “following” that stretched from New York to San Francisco, from Minneapolis to New Orleans.

One American “triumph” is so much like another that, after a bit, Willard (who was always a restless soul), thought he would come back to England. His contemporaries there—people who had begun as “first walking gentlemen,” and carrying banners in provincial pantomimes, etc.—were gradually outstripping him. Several of them had theatres of their own, and others were being talked of as being in the running for knighthoods. “Rise, Sir Edward Willard,” etc., had an hypnotic ring about it. Stranger things had happened. Accordingly (and not to make a long story too long), one fine day the wanderer did come back to England, with the lease of a theatre in his “grip,” a successfully produced drama to submit to the suffrages of London playgoers, and a complete company of capable actors and actresses.

It was when Willard opened his London campaign that I got connected up with him. The position ac-

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corded me was quite a minor one, and on the managerial, not the acting, side of the curtain. Still, it more or less brought me into very close touch with a very remarkable man.

Willard's season was not exactly a fiasco. Yet, to call it even a moderate success would be unduly stretching a point. The theatre was the St. James's, and the rent was £250 a week, which is about half what would now be demanded. All promised well for a start. A fairly good company—the principal "support" being provided by Herbert Waring—had been secured, the Press assiduously fed with paragraphs, and a popular actor re-appearing after a prolonged absence, and in a drama that had certainly created a furore in America. This was "The Cardinal," written by the prolific Louis Napoleon Parker.

But the whole thing fell as flat as a pancake. There were two main reasons for this. First of all, Willard had absented himself from London much too long. He had been a "star," certainly, but he was now a bit of an ancient light, and his perfervid admirers of the "Silver King" and "Judah" days were succeeded by a fresh school of playgoers. Secondly, "The Cardinal," in which he elected to make his re-appearance, was sad stuff, and little more than fustian masquerading as something worth while and full of dreadfully long-winded speeches and ridiculous "situations." I know very well it had been a vast success in America, but the Americans are simple souls where their dramatic tastes are concerned.

I shall not easily forget the first night. The St.

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James's was of course crowded with a typical audience (George Alexander, the most unselfish of men, had done all he could to help a comrade), and everybody was prepared to give the piece a good send off. But all to no purpose. In the middle of Act 1, after a preliminary fifteen minutes' dullness, Willard swept grandiloquently on to the stage, an impressive figure in red robes, and gazed steadily at the serried masses before him. As he did so, an old gentleman in the stalls, who had been slumbering peacefully through the first quarter of an hour, suddenly woke up, shot a startled glance at the scarlet-clad Prince of the Church, and exclaimed in an audible voice—"My God, Mother Shipton!"

It was distinctly comic, but would have been even more so if it had not been anticipated by Macready, who did just the same thing at a rehearsal fifty years earlier.

When the melodramatic rhodomontade and clap-trap of "The Cardinal" had exhausted the suffrages of even the pit and gallery, Willard fell back on Barrie (who had served him well in the past), and revived "The Professor's Love Story." In this he gave a really excellent performance, full of clever touches. But the piece was by now rather *vieux jeu*, for it had already been played both at the Comedy and the Garrick. Nor was a subsequent effort to whip up enthusiasm in a version of "Tom Pinch" any the more successful.

As a matter of dramatic history that is not generally known, I may mention that during this six

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months' season at the St. James's, Willard started rehearsing a Cromwellian play by Stephen Phillips. H. B. Irving was to have appeared in it. After about the second rehearsal, however, he threw in his hand. Thereupon Willard—advisably, I think, for it was a precious dull drama—dropped the scheme and took up a fresh project. This was to go on tour through the country, visiting in turn the chief provincial towns. The tour was to last from January until June, and, as I always like travelling at other people's expense, I accepted an invitation to join it.

The experience of that six months' tour was decidedly interesting, but I am afraid it did not prove over profitable either to Willard or to the proprietors of the different theatres we visited. In fact, it became part of my professional duties to conduct some very acrimonious correspondence with certain of the latter, who complained bitterly of having been "let down." All the same, I thoroughly enjoyed the trip. We travelled very comfortably, too, for our chief did things in princely style, and engaged a saloon for his headquarter staff.

The tour opened at Bradford, and went on in succession to Newcastle, Hull, Sheffield, Liverpool, and Manchester, etc., visiting none but what in theatrical parlance are known as "Number One" towns, and finishing at Brighton. The financial results must have been very disappointing. Thus, at Hull we rang up on a Monday night to less than £10, and seldom touched £300 for a full week of eight performances. There were at least two good reasons for

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this bad "business." One was that provincial playgoers had no more use for such pretentious bombast as "The Cardinal" than had people in London; and the other was that, throughout the entire tour, we always found a rival attraction in Cochran's old friend Hackenschmidt at the local music hall. As Willard said, he could stand performing fleas or any other legitimate opposition, but a wrestling champion was really too much.

Willard was a rich man, and cared very little about losing money. The blow to his professional pride, however, occasioned by the scanty and apathetic audiences before which he continually appeared, was another thing altogether. It had a bad result on his temperament. First of all, he became gloomy and morose, and then he gave way to fits of furious ill-temper. These became so pronounced that there were times when he absolutely lost control of himself, and would lock himself up in his dressing-room and bellow like a bull. Presenting the nightly "returns" to him on such occasions was very similar to firing a train of gunpowder. I was told, by people who knew him, that these unfortunate ebullitions were really the result of a severe illness contracted in America. Our comedian referred to them as evidence of "bread in the bone," Willard being the son of a Brighton baker. In his normal moments, however, he was a pleasant and companionable enough man, and there is no getting over the fact that, when furnished with a suitable medium, he was also a first-class actor. The trouble was, in his later years he

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insisted on selecting parts for which he was quite unfitted.

3.

A player of very different calibre from Willard, and with whom at one time I also had some connection, was Martin Harvey. Studious and well-bred, and possessed of great personal charm and an engaging simplicity of manner, I always found him as unlike the average actor as it would be possible to conceive. With his slight boyish figure and rather frail physique, it comes as a distinct surprise to hear the amount of vehement truculence he can put into a part that demands it. But, notwithstanding his habitually gentle demeanour and the suggestion that butter would not melt in his mouth, he has very strong opinions on most subjects and no qualms about expressing them in vigorous language. Apropos, when he declined (on the amply sufficient grounds that it was ill-written) to produce a certain play he had commissioned, Herman Merivale, the disappointed author, dubbed his letters "Harvey's Sauce." The end of this particular drama was that Cunninghame Graham was called in to prepare another version. As a matter of theatrical history, it was no great success either.

When I was with him, Martin Harvey was appearing (as usual) in "The Only Way." This, of course, was inevitable; and he would have been foolish to offer anything else when this particular drama served him so well. I have not got the exact figures, but I am quite convinced that, by the acid test of num-

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ber of performances, it has been to him what "Chu Chin Chow" (or "Cairo," as it now seems to be called), has been to Oscar Asche, and "The Silver King" to Henry Arthur Jones. Probably more.

Talking of "The Only Way," I was once shown the original script. As first written, it was called "The Jackal," and bore the names of two authors. It is now generally advertised with no author's name on it at all. I rather fancy, though, that Martin Harvey wrote most of the present version himself, for the prompt copy now in use bears very little resemblance to the original work of Frederick Langbridge and Freeman Wills. This suppression of authorship, however, appears to be the fashion in the world of the Theatre. Tremendous publicity is always accorded to the leading actor and actress, the producer, the manager, the assistant manager, the individual in charge of the box-office, and even the wig-maker. Very often, too, the Press agent—a parasite who hands out the dope to the compilers of "dramatic gossip"—is given a line to himself on the programme. One will, however, generally look in vain in the average advertisement for the name of the person who has merely written the play. The fact is, beside these others, he is usually regarded as of no sort of importance; and if he is mentioned at all, it is in microscopic print, and apparently as an after-thought.

Martin Harvey has had a pretty severe struggle to reach his present position. Like most people in it, he is not particularly fond of claimants too near

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his throne. After, all, there is only a certain amount of limelight available for distribution. Hence, his company, while workman-like enough, is never distinguished for—well—super-brilliancy. In selecting it, he probably thinks of his own experience at the hands of Irving, who, as is well known, would never tolerate any “support” that threatened his own prestige in the smallest degree. It is perfectly true that, in addition to Martin Harvey himself, he had George Alexander and Forbes-Robertson under his banner at the Lyceum; but it is also perfectly true that if they had not seized the opportunity of getting out of his management, they would probably never have emerged much beyond the humble position of “walking gentlemen.”

I think, however, that Martin Harvey's company know when they are well off, for I believe he has more applications to serve under him than any other actor-manager. Still, his people do leave him sometimes, and for all sorts of reasons. I know one youth who joined the company after appearing as the milestone in “Dick Whittington,” or something else on a similar plane of intellectual endeavour. His opinion of himself and his abilities was positively colossal. Somehow, Martin Harvey, although sympathetic, as he always is to ambitious young histrions, seemed unable to share it. Anyway, he did not exactly jump at the suggestion that his leading man should be summarily scrapped and the new arrival promoted to the position. Thereupon the budding Irving (as he con-

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sidered himself) promptly resigned. Martin Harvey bore the blow with fortitude.

"What are you going to do now?" I asked the youth when he discussed the matter with me.

"I'm going into management on my own," was the lofty response. "It's the only thing to do."

As he had some money, and I hoped that some of it would come my way, I congratulated him on his decision.

"Thanks, very much," he returned. "Of course, I shall want you for my business manager. Consider that settled."

The next afternoon my soaring young friend walked into the Green Room Club and announced his plans. As he offered engagements to everyone right and left, he became immensely popular.

"Yes, dear boy," he remarked to an elderly mummer, "I'm going on an entirely new system. My idea is to give my company a two years' contract straight off. Will you join me?"

"A two years' contract would suit me very well," returned the other thoughtfully, "but, look here, I must have a fortnight certain."

Martin Harvey has a very large circle of friends and acquaintances, and seems to know everybody. His personal friends are not confined—as is so often the case with stage folk—to actors and actresses and cinema stars. They include people who are really representative of other worlds than that of the Theatre and the Films. In his pleasant house at Hampstead (and which, by the way, he has recently left

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for one nearer Regent's Park), I have met quite distinguished lights of the artistic, commercial, financial, literary and musical spheres.

In this connection, I once made rather an unfortunate *gaffe*. Still, it might have happened to anybody. I was at Martin Harvey's house one afternoon when Mr. Gordon Selfridge was announced. On my being introduced to him, he began talking very interestingly about "salesmanship" and "business uplift," etc. Although just a bit over my head, it was none the less good stuff.

Presently, during our conversation, Martin Harvey introduced me to "Mr. Shannon."

"Ha," I said to myself, "Shannon's letter files, of course," and thereupon—and with the idea of broaching a congenial topic—promptly discussed these valuable aids to office work, hoping incidentally to get an expert opinion on them. But my new acquaintance seemed quite uninterested. Worse, he looked bored. At last, he blurted out that he did not even know what a letter file was.

"But I thought you made them," I expostulated. "I've just bought one with your name on it from Selfridge's."

"Very likely," was the response, "but if I happen to make anything at all, it's pictures."

It was not till then that it dawned upon me that the supposititious commercial magnate was really Shannon, R.A.

Still, don't blame me. As I said just now, it might

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have happened to any one even less accustomed than myself to meeting important people.

4.

Just as I did not know Tree intimately, so also was I unacquainted with Henry Irving. Accordingly, and in strong contrast to most people who write their reminiscences, I am not going to give any "personal" impressions of him. Of course, I saw him times without number, but all these times were, with one exception, when he was in the theatre. The solitary occasion when we met privately was at his own request. What brought this about was that I had had some correspondence with him, and his handwriting was so extraordinarily illegible that his replies were absolutely unreadable. When I wrote and told him so, he sent me another letter, which, after consulting several experts, I took to say, "come and see me in my rooms."

Irving was then living in Stratton Street. Remarkably trivial things interest us; and, hence, what interested me about the Lyceum chief as much as anything else, was that a few years earlier he had occupied a set of chambers in Grafton Street belonging to a relative of myself. I don't suppose it was a bond between us, but, when I mentioned the matter to him casually, Irving began to "reminisce" on his own account.

During our brief interview I found Irving much the same outside the Lyceum as inside it. He acted

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the whole time. Thus, when I entered the room he told me to "be seated," and when I left he said "fare well." His austerity and aloofness, however, were nothing more than a cloak he habitually wore. In reality, he was warm-hearted, impulsive, and extremely generous (witness his private charities) with a great liking for pretty women and the pleasant things of this world. Towards his brother actor-managers, however, he was not always charitably inclined, and would discuss their merits and demerits with quite remarkable frankness. Tree, for example, he frankly detested—he even went so far as to call him a "dammed mummer"; and his recorded opinion of George Alexander's abilities was not over complimentary.

CHAPTER X

BEHIND THE SCENES

Irving's Aide-de-camp—Playhouse Parasites—Bram Stoker's Devotion
—Play Producing—Suspect Statue—Labelling the Illustrious—
Failure of the Film—"Improving" the Classics—Impudence on
the Screen.

1.

ANY mention of Henry Irving leads naturally to mention of one who was for years his faithful watchdog and right-hand man. This was Bram Stoker, to whose unswerving fidelity and marked business aptitude the Lyceum chief probably owed a good deal more than he acknowledged or realized. When Irving was up in the clouds (and where, by the way, he habitually lived), Stoker was down in the box-office, doing unobtrusive, but uncommonly useful, work. As a matter of fact, if Stoker had not been on the bridge, the Lyceum ship would have foundered a lot sooner than it did. The trouble was, Irving—who, despite his general astuteness, was a pretty poor judge of character, and would believe any one who flattered him sufficiently—surrounded himself with a greedy host of third-rate parasites at the expense of the theatre's not inexhaustible revenues. These merchants called themselves "literary advisers," or some-

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thing equally high sounding. They were, however, merely able hacks, whose sole business it was to write speeches full of classical quotations and historical allusions, which Irving delivered to awe-struck gatherings in the provinces and America, and prepare the profound articles which from time to time appeared under his signature in portentous monthly reviews. It was pure dope of course, but the public wanted it, and it went down.

Stoker, who had more brains than the entire pack put together, hated the sight of them. He once told me that if he could have made a clean sweep of the lot, the Lyceum treasury would have been saved some thousands a year. Irving, however, would not listen to such a proposal for a moment. He thought it enhanced his dignity to be surrounded by a courtier-like crowd of sycophants. As a matter of fact, it merely made people laugh at him.

“Bram”—as he was always called, and whom I knew very well—was a big, red-bearded, untidy Irishman, who had started life in the Civil Service. He told me—and I quite credit it—that he always carried his dress suit in a small despatch case. From the concertina-like creases in them, I should have been fully prepared to believe that he rolled up the trousers and put them in his pocket.

To see Stoker in his element was to see him standing at the top of the theatre's stairs, surveying a “first-night” crowd trooping up them. There was no mistake about it—a Lyceum *première* did draw an audience that really was representative of the best

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of that period in the realms of art, literature, and society. Admittance was a very jealously guarded privilege. Stoker, indeed, looked upon the stalls, dress circle, and boxes as if they were annexes to the Royal Enclosure at Ascot, and one almost had to be proposed and seconded before the coveted ticket would be issued. The ragtag-and-bobtail of the musical comedy, theatrical, stock exchange and journalistic worlds who foregather at a present-day *première* would certainly have been sent away with a flea in their ear.

During the latter period of his life, and after Irving's death, I saw a good deal of Bram Stoker. There was some sort of connection between him and Frankfort Moore. I am not very clear on the subject, but I fancy he had married Moore's sister. This was probably the case, for "Mrs. Bram" was a charming woman and brim full of Irish wit and impulsiveness.

The Stokers lived just off the King's Road, Chelsea; and, as they knew everybody worth knowing, and were also exceedingly hospitable, one could always make sure of finding interesting people there. Among those whom I thus met on several occasions was W. S. Gilbert. Sir William, of course, if only as a librettist of real distinction, had an interesting personality. Candour, however, compels me to remark that it was not an agreeable one. The truth is, he always (as he grew older) conducted himself in a most irascible fashion, and habitually barked at inoffensive strangers like a stage colonel. One afternoon when I hap-

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pened to be there, a young actress asked Stoker to introduce her to the great man. It was an inopportune moment, for Gilbert, who was in a worse temper than usual—I fancy he must have overheard some tactless person praising Sullivan—shook his head fiercely.

“Don’t want to know her,” he growled. “Want to be left alone.”

Yet, when people took him at his word and did leave him alone, he only sulked more than ever. The truth is, he was in his later years merely a quarrelsome and somewhat underbred old gentleman, who had been quite spoiled by the exaggerated deference shown him during the palmy days of the Savoy Theatre.

Talking of Savoyards, one of last of the original members still left is Rutland Barrington. Some months ago I attended a “benefit” performance arranged on his behalf at the theatre where he had made so many personal triumphs. He was then, however, so ill and broken that it was all he could do to sit propped up in a box. When his Savoy career ceased, I doubt if things went too well with him. But, despite his martyrdom to gout, he kept on working, instead of sitting in theatrical clubs and talking of past successes. He was for some time under the banner of George Edwardes at Daly’s, and afterwards in one or two more than usually inane musical comedies elsewhere.

Barrington’s trouble in this age of fierce competition was that he belonged emphatically to the “old

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school." Yet, it was in many respects a very good school. I wish some of the modern mummers could be sent to it for a bit.

2.

Irving's untimely death must have been in many ways a great blow to Bram Stoker. Apart from the sudden severance of a close friendship between them that had existed for some forty years, it meant the abrupt and entire cessation of his sole source of income. He had drawn a large (but well-earned) salary from the Lyceum treasury, and had lived up to every penny of it. Accordingly, on Irving's death, the problem of ways and means began to press rather hardly. Still, despite the fact that he was getting on in years, Stoker had plenty of grit, and thrust himself into the rough-and-tumble anew, and with characteristic vigour. But he met with many rebuffs, for the Lyceum tradition was not wanted in the quarters where he offered his services. He even went after a five-pound-a-week job at a Manchester Exhibition, and when the committee turned him down, he did his best to get it for me instead.

In addition, however, to theatrical management, which he knew from A to Z, Stoker had a second string to his bow. This was writing "shockers" of the "Dracula" type, with which he had years earlier made a considerable success. To keep the domestic pot boiling, he also did a bit of journalism when the opportunity offered, and, of course, he wrote a "life" of Irving. There was a good deal of Stoker in it,

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certainly, but this sort of thing is more or less inevitable. Any way, I never found a biography worth reading if not at least tinged with the author's personality. But, although he made most money by his weird and truly thrilling "Dracula," and most fame by his Irving study, the volume of which he was most proud was a slim and severely technical little brochure dealing with the "Duties of Clerks of Petty Sessions."

My last adventures in theatre-land occurred a year or two before the war. As showing what could be done then, if one went the right way to work, I may mention that I secured a theatre in the heart of the West End for a mere £70 a week. It is perfectly true that the house had a "bad name" (the Stage is the home and forcing-ground of foolish superstition), and had been empty for some time. Still, the rent of this particular theatre now works out at something like £70 a performance.

Never mind the name of the play. It was a pretty bad specimen, and is best buried in the oblivion that speedily overtook it. All the same, I have seen much worse efforts succeed. We had a fairly good company, and our "lead" drew £50 a week. Being a good business man, as well as a good actor, he insisted on his first month's salary being deposited in a bank. Here he showed his wisdom, for his first month's salary was also his last month's salary. I had an idea of my own that things were just a little—well, unusual—as just before our *première* I received a letter from a solicitor forbidding me to hand over any of

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the profits to the author, as they had already been mortgaged to a money-lender. He need not have worried himself.

Although we did pretty bad business, the rent of the theatre and the salary list, together with all other legitimate charges, were met all right. The management had to put up with a certain amount of calumny, but there was certainly no "Mr. Bogus" to blot our 'scutcheon (as has happened in more than one London theatre during the last few years). Instead of the usual "syndicate" of stage-struck stockbrokers, the venture was financed by a sporting baronet. I am afraid he didn't get much of a run for his money. As a matter of fact, he got about three weeks' "run." Still, I will say he never grumbled. The author was the person to be most commiserated. This was his first play, and he had taken a lot of trouble with it. However, he has now directed his talents to a more remunerative line of literary endeavour. This is that of running an art journal, under the ægis of a wealthy soap-boiler, who cheerfully meets the considerable printer's bills. As for the play, the aspiring dramatist has already turned it into a novel, and one of these fine days I shall probably see it on the "screen."

3.

Talking of this matter of people with two strings to their bow, it is certainly a little odd that if the usual reference books prior to 1914 are consulted, no mention will be found in them of one who is (and for

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the last ten years has been) perhaps the most conspicuous of the lot; and he is even absent from the champion "Notes About Nobodies" volume in existence, viz., the 1922 "Who's Who." Yet Albert de Courville, who has achieved this distinction, is very far from being unknown, and to a very large circle, in both the theatrical and journalistic worlds. Apart from his other claims to occupy a niche in public estimation, he invented that popular hotchpotch of George Robey and gorgeous mounting, termed "revue" by people who don't know what this expression really means, and has thus enabled the Hippodrome to weather storms that would have engulfed any less intelligently managed enterprise.

Before going to Leicester Square (and in quite a minor capacity at first), de Courville graduated on the reporting staff of the *Evening News*. This gave him an opportunity of penetrating into the *coulisses* of the music hall, and with considerable advantage to himself. The experience also provided him with that valuable equipment, a knowledge of how to "work the Press," and his official communiqués to the assiduous chroniclers of dramatic chit-chat are veritable models of what such things should be.

A year or two ago a vast statue of the King of the Belgians stood in the courtyard of Burlington House. It was labelled simply ALBERT. Apparently considering this inscription to be lacking in detail, an admirer of the Moss Empires magnate waited one evening until the shades of night had fallen, and then added in big letters, DE COURVILLE.

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Thus the tale, as told round the cheese at the Bod-
ega, and other accepted haunts of the stage world.

But, very likely, not a word of truth in it.

4.

While I like the theatre (and most of what in it is), I am not going to pretend that I like its rival, the cinema. I have seen a good many films (but very few good films), and dislike them all. I dare-say I am unreasonable and prejudiced—or whatever you choose to call it—for holding this distinctly unpopular view. All the same, there is no law (at present) forbidding it; and, until there is one, I shall do as I please about the matter.

My main objection to the cinema is based on the impudent and unwarrantable fashion in which certain producers lay violent hands on what I (having, although you may not think it, been properly brought up), regard as classics. I quite admit it is more or less necessary to make alterations in the originals when preparing screen versions of well-known books. Still, there are limits to what may, and what emphatically may not, be done in this direction. Too often they are overstepped.

“Reference foregoing”—as all the best business firms say—I think the limit (and a bit more) was certainly reached in an announcement that I read the other day. It ran something like this:—

“Messrs. Flicker and Co. beg to inform the film-loving public that they have just arranged to screen,

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at positively enormous expense, a series of popular literary masterpieces. The first one (featuring Mr. Kemble Gasbags and Miss Fairy Flapperton), selected for the purpose, is 'Tom Brown's School-days.' As, however, this in its original form is not entirely suitable for filming, we have ventured to make a few slight alterations in the plot, and also to increase the interest by introducing some fresh characters. Thus, the hero, Tom Brown (Mr. Gasbags), is provided with a charming sister (Miss Fairy Flapperton), who falls in love with one of Tom's schoolmates at Rugby College," etc., etc.

"Ventured" is distinctly good. All the same, I wonder if sheer impudence could go much further? If it does, one of these fine days I shall quite expect to see a "feminine interest"—I believe this is the technical term—introduced into a film version of "Sandford and Merton." One of the "episodes" might then be laid in a night club, and depict the Rev. Mr. Barlow rescuing his youthful charges from the clutches of a designing harpy. This would certainly prove a "cinch." I trust whoever adopts the suggestion will not forget to pay me a handsome royalty.

A second hooligan, not to be outdone in a similar act of vandalism at the expense of a literary man's reputation (first, however, discreetly waiting until his victim was quite dead), picked out "Rookwood" for his fell purpose. This rascal, by the way, being dissatisfied with poor old Harrison Ainsworth's choice of a title, actually had the colossal effrontery to alter it to "Dauntless Dick Turpin," or something of the

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sort. Why not "Sweeney Todd," while he was about it? He might then have sold another copy.

If there isn't an Authors' Defence League, there seems to be room for one.

A few weeks ago an enthusiast took me to a "trade show" of a "great new film with a heart interest." I have already forgotten the name of this production, but it ought to have been the "World's Worst Film." It was a truly deplorable piece of nonsense, and even my companion admitted, much against his will, that it was "pretty bad." Yet, a lot of good money had obviously been spent on it, for there were some well-known people in the cast. As a matter of fact, it subsequently transpired in the Law Courts, that the leading man drew a modest £90 a week, while the leading lady had a bagatelle of £50.

Why am I not in the movies myself?

But the question exercising me at the moment was how on earth had such dull rubbish got as far as being submitted to an audience of presumed experts at a trade show? How had it even managed to get screened at all? I examined the programme. There I found the reason. It was really quite simple. The author and the leading man (the £90 a week merchant) were both directors of the producing-company concerned, and the money had, of course, come out of the pockets of their deluded shareholders.

If this is typical of the fashion in which "great new films" are put on the market, the explanation why so much rubbish is flung in the faces of the public is no longer a mystery.

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To round off my story, I may here observe that the "trade" did not bite, and this particular film, with "heart interest" complete, still lacks a renter.

Perhaps I am hypercritical and want too much for my money, but I never find the dramas inside a cinema house nearly as exciting as the posters which have lured me to them. This annoys me, for I feel that A1 posters and C3 films are a fraud on the public.

Thus, the other day, induced by the hypnotic picture in the entrance hall, of a lovely damsel wielding a dagger positively dripping with gore, I went to sample an alleged attraction, having the thrilling title, "Boiled in Blood!" or something equally alluring. Poor stuff; and, beyond the basic fact that the villain's intentions towards the Mary Pickford-like heroine were strictly dishonourable from the very start, no real thrills at all. Indeed, half way through the first "episode," I got so bored that I went outside to have another look at the poster.

Altogether, my considered opinion of the cinema seems to be much the same as that of Thomas Burke. I don't remember if he expressed it in his "Limehouse Nights," but he certainly appears unable to keep it out of any of his other books, whatever their subject.

But this characteristic only makes them all the more interesting, for a man who writes a book without wandering into occasional side issues seldom advances beyond a machine-like level of precision and dullness.

CHAPTER XI

JOURNEYS IN GRUB STREET

Editorial Inaccessibility—Poser for Sonnetists—Picture Papers—First Aid for Pressmen—"Society and Satire"—Writers and Writs—Conversational Champion—"Personal" Periodicals—"Money in Religion."

1.

ALTHOUGH I have done (and still do) a good deal of work for newspapers, I scarcely know an editor from an office boy. As a matter of fact, there are only three editors whom I could identify if I saw them in the street, and only one with whom I have any personal acquaintance. The loss, of course, is entirely mine.

Years ago, however, I made rather a practice of cultivating such important individuals, and clamored up many a dingy staircase to see them in their dens. As a general rule they were extremely accessible, and saw anybody who called, even if he had an obvious bundle of manuscripts (as I usually had) sticking out of his pocket. There was always a chance (so one of them told me) that the visitor might be an eminent financier in disguise who had come to "back" the paper. I rather doubt if this ever occurred, for all the eminent financiers I know invari-

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ably transact such business through the medium of their solicitors.

There was, however, one marked exception to this custom of accessibility to the editorial sanctum. This was Mudford, of the *Standard*. He would deny himself even to his staff, and no stranger had the smallest prospect of getting through the barbed wire fence with which he metaphorically surrounded himself. He even carried this aloofness into his private life. There is a story still current in Grub Street that a member of the Government, being particularly anxious to see him, once called at his house.

"Tell Mr. Mudford that Lord —— is here and wishes to see him," he said to the servant who opened the door.

"Tell Lord —— that the Editor of the *Standard* is at dinner," exclaimed an angry voice from an inner room.

With these curious methods of conducting it in vogue, it is not surprising that the poor old *Standard* has ceased to exist.

I fancy that the first real editor with whom I got into anything like personal contact was Commander Robinson, R. N., then guiding the rather insecure destinies of a weekly journal for Messrs. Newnes. As I wanted to contribute to this organ I wrote to the editor. Not being quite sure of his rank, I thought I would be on the safe side, and accordingly addressed him as Admiral. Apparently this had a good effect, for he received my tentative suggestions in a most friendly fashion, and I soon established a dis-

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tinctly remunerative connection with him. After this I made it a rule when writing, in the first instance, to naval or military occupants of editorial chairs, to give them at least two steps in brevet rank. It worked remarkably well.

2.

The *Pall Mall Gazette* has a habit of changing its proprietor and staff so frequently that it is difficult for an outsider to discover who is really at the helm nowadays. When I first knew the paper there was considerably less feverish activity in the office, which was then established in Charing Cross Road, than is now the case. But things in the journalistic world went more easily then.

Douglas Straight, who edited the *P. M. G.* when I first knew it, was a curious mixture of courtesy and incompetence. His great trouble was that he could never say no—at any rate, not definitely. As he had hosts of friends—for he was deservedly one of the most popular men in London—all of whom worried him to take their work, his inherent desire to be obliging was often severely taxed. He was a great diner-out, and seldom returned to his office the next morning without being oppressed with the reflection that he had promised at least a dozen chance acquaintances to use their proffered contributions. His assistant, Charles Morley, however, had no such qualms, and could always be relied upon to return these unsolicited offerings by very early post. What his chief would have done without him I don't know.

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Douglas Straight's invariable courtesy—especially towards beginners—was once put to a pretty heavy test by myself. I was living abroad at the time, and on the strength of having had a couple of articles accepted, actually had the impudence to propose myself as a foreign correspondent, and at a handsome salary. Straight never said no to any one in a rude fashion. Still, he very nearly broke his record in answering my impudence. I don't blame him. However, he clearly did not bear malice, for when, shortly afterwards, the Astor millions brought it into being, he let me write for the *Pall Mall Magazine*, which he also conducted. It was a "de luxe" organ, and then regarded as the very last word in such periodicals.

I rather fancy, though, that Charles Morley was really responsible for the *Magazine*, as Straight confined himself almost entirely to the weekly *Budget* (with Lewis Hind helping him) and the daily *Gazette*. The monthly also had an "associate editor." This position was at one period occupied by an individual who had evidently been selected for his name—he was understood to be a relative of a duke—rather than for his literary knowledge and ability. At any rate, there is a more than usually well founded story that he once wrote to a distinguished poet in this remarkable fashion:—

"Dear Mr. — Please send me a sonnet for the next number. It should not fill more than two pages of the *Magazine*."

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3.

The editor whom I knew best at the start was John Latey. Although he could easily see seventy peeping round the corner, he was still always known as John Latey "junior." He was then in charge of the *Sketch*, which Clement Shorter had founded. Latey was the soul of courtesy and consideration, and had an old-fashioned dignity and deliberation in his methods that the "hustling" youths who sit in editorial chairs nowadays (when they would be much more in their element playing marbles in the passages outside) would probably hold in immense contempt. Still, it is a pity that they don't copy these qualities. After all, John Latey might have been a bit mid-Victorian in his ideas, but he got good work out of his contributors by treating them like gentlemen, and behaving like one himself.

The assistant editor of the *Sketch* at this time (and afterwards in full charge) was a tall, slim youth, who, on coming down from Oxford a few months earlier, had been doing a bit of reporting for a news agency. He is still tall, but neither quite so slim nor quite so youthful; and, since those days (when he sat in preliminary judgment on my efforts) has blossomed into a highly successful novelist and a moderately successful playwright. His name was John Keble Bell, now very widely known as "Keble Howard." In his "Smiths of Surbiton" and "Lord London" he has written two really first-class novels. This is a good deal more than any nine out of ten of his contemporaries seem able to do.

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All sorts of people—several of whom have advanced since then from journalism to somewhere nearer literature—worked for the *Sketch* during Latey's consulship. One of Max Beerbohm's best articles is enshrined in its early pages; then Mrs. Belloc Lowndes (Hilaire Belloc's sister) was an indefatigable purveyor of what Fleet Street jargon calls "pars"; and Sir William Robertson Nichol (with his accolade still in the distant future) dealt with books. There was one curious merchant (he is now amassing, to my mind, fabulous sums by turning out serials) who used to drop in twice a week and murmur in a sepulchral and wistful voice, "any crumbs, please, this morning?" The amount of nourishment he extracted (in the way of commissions to "write up" photographs or interview leading actresses) made me quite envious. When John Latey was gathered to his fathers a lot of hard working scribes lost a good friend.

As part of my literary equipment was the possession of a very resplendent top hat, John Latey once instructed me to interview a feminine light of the musical comedy world. This lady was no stranger to publicity experts and their ways. She knew that they appreciated being saved trouble. Accordingly, when I (being inexperienced) blushinglly apologized for troubling her, she calmly handed me a ready-made interview written by herself.

It was a veritable model of its kind, and began as follows:—

"Miss Fairy Footlights, the well known and ac-

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complished actress, is extremely averse to newspaper publicity, and it was only with considerable reluctance that she was eventually prevailed upon to give our representative a few particulars referring to her histrionic career. This, as our readers are aware, is remarkably distinguished.

“‘I cannot imagine,’ she declared with a charming smile, ‘why people should want to know anything about me. Perhaps, however, they would be interested to learn that I was not intended for the Stage as my father, the late Chas. Robertson Esq.—’”
etc. etc.

Good stuff all through, and, eked out with a couple of photographs showing the lady’s bathroom and bedroom, just the thing that was wanted.

Since then this talented member of her profession has gone far. She certainly deserves to have done so.

4.

An editor of a very different calibre from Latey, and with whom I came a good deal into contact, was James Davis. He was the brother of a very clever woman who wrote as “Frank Danby,” and the uncle of Gilbert Frankau, the author of a very good novel in “Peter Jameson,” and of some very bad ones in several others. Among his many activities he also happened to be a solicitor.

To most people Davis was best known as “Owen Hall” (otherwise “Owing All”), under which well selected and admirably descriptive pseudonym he

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wrote a number of musical comedy "books," conspicuous among them being "A Gaiety Girl" and "Floradora." He had good qualifications for this field of literary endeavour, being a real wit (of a singular mordant and biting nature) and an exceptionally keen observer. His work was sometimes cruel, and not always in the best of taste. Still, if he gave good hard knocks, he certainly took plenty for himself.

When I first came across Davis he was running a weekly paper called the *Phoenix*, officially described as an organ of "Society and Satire." There was a good deal more satire than anything else about it, for the "society" portion only appeared to recognize the lights of commerce and the Stock Exchange. I fancy that the *Phoenix* was really the new form of a predecessor. But this was Davis's way. He was always running a paper, and when he got into trouble over it he would close it down summarily and bring out the next number under a fresh title. He got into trouble pretty often with his journalistic activities. The fact is, he habitually dipped his pen into vinegar instead of the safer and more customary blue-black, and was as libellous as he dared. He generally dared to be very libellous indeed, since he had an unbounded contempt for most people and a fear of none. The day that passed without a writ being delivered at the instance of some angry reader was considered by him to be wasted.

"Put it along with the others," he would remark blandly to the emissaries from Ely Place, who brought these familiar documents to his sanctum.

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This all made for brightness in the office, which was somewhere off Lombard Street. Nothing humdrum there.

But one fine morning, having delivered himself of a more virulent (but devilishly entertaining) attack than usual on some particularly big pot in the financial world, he found running the *Phoenix* too expensive a hobby. The wings of the fabled bird were accordingly clipped to such purpose that the paper drooped and died. Henry Blanchamp, the assistant editor, went to the *Saturday Review* (an odd transition, perhaps, but Blanchamp had tons of ability), and Davis turned his attention to other spheres.

Apart from his truculence and exasperating habit of not paying his contributors (of whom I was one) except under strong pressure, Davis was extraordinarily amusing and good hearted. It was impossible to quarrel with him.

"Can't pay you for your bilge," he would declare. "Frightfully sorry, of course, and all that, but my backers won't cough up. Tell you what, though, I'll take you out to lunch."

Over the meal, for which he invariably patronized an ultra-expensive resort (with a cab waiting outside the door), the genial "Jimmie" would spend enough to liquidate his indebtedness to me twice over. But then, and as he was always careful to explain, he had credit at every restaurant in London.

One of Davis's bright schemes, when more than usually pressed for cash, was to turn himself into a limited company. I forget the precise details (al-

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though I was invited to "come in on the ground floor"), but roughly, the idea was that his prospective income from writing musical comedy "books" should be collateral security for money advanced. He even went so far as to secure a "syndicate" of City gentlemen with company-promoting noses, but I never heard that it came to anything. Perhaps it was just as well for the shareholders for whom he angled that they refused to "bite," since he died shortly afterwards. To invest money in the personality of any one individual, however talented he may be, is always a risky business.

5.

Another Davis whom I knew, and who figured very prominently in the theatrical and journalistic worlds (but at a much later period than the one I have just mentioned) was the double-barrelled Newnham-Davis. He was a genial, entertaining, hail-fellow-well-met with all and sundry sort of persons, and by no means devoid of ability. In his latter days, however, he exhibited a regrettable readiness to descend to writing vulgar puffs for tradesmen and restaurants. I think he must have been *persona grata* (as they say in Fleet Street) to every hotel proprietor and restaurateur in London.

To go into one of these places with him was a remarkable experience. The managers and head waiters did not exactly strew rose leaves before him, but they certainly grovelled at his approach and observed an obsequious deference that would scarcely have

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been accorded to Royalty itself. His ready acceptance of this cringing attitude always struck me as odd, for it was really quite foreign to his upbringing. As a matter of fact, Newnham-Davis was a man of good family, with the tradition of Harrow and twenty years' regimental service behind him (he had retired as a colonel), and belonged to a couple of clubs where such habits were not encouraged.

Under the pseudonym of the "Dwarf of Blood," Newnham-Davis was a great stand-by of a somewhat Rabelaisian organ (conducted by a bottle-nosed racing man named John Corlett), and could always be confidently depended on to turn out at short notice a column of quite readable journalism. This curious paper was not really half so indecent as it pretended to be, and was immensely popular among office boys, bar loafers, touts, subalterns, and undergraduates, etc. Yet it certainly had some clever people on its staff, for despite his taproom proclivities, the proprietor knew his business. The best of the batch was Spencer-Mott, who elected to be known as "Gubbins." An odd taste. Still, entirely his own affair.

As a side line to his sub-editorial and journalistic activities, Newnham-Davis wrote a number of books—principally about restaurants (his "Gourmet's Guide" being quite a standard work)—and also dallied with the theatre. In this latter direction his taste inclined towards musical comedy, and his name as author figured on the programmes of several popular efforts. I remember seeing Dennis Eadie—now a full-fledged actor-manager—prancing about in

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the chorus of one of these. In case he may have forgotten this useful (if humble) experience—as actor-managers often do—I will mention that the piece was “Lady Madcap,” and the theatre was the Prince of Wales’s.

6.

A weekly journal not altogether unlike the *Phoenix*, but run on rather different lines, was the *Candid Friend*, for which I also did a good deal of work. My job was writing theatrical notices, interviewing beautiful play actresses, criticising books (provided the publishers advertised them first), and furnishing topical paragraphs at space rates. I never quite discovered what these “space rates” were, and the editor himself did not seem very clear on the subject. Thus, one week they would be a couple of guineas a column, and the next week a couple of shillings. The fact is, Frank Harris, the editor, with Teixeira de Mattos (of all people!) as his assistant, was—and like Jimmie Davis—always much more ready to stand a contributor a gorgeous luncheon at the Café Royal (his favourite haunt) than to pay him cash down the trifle that happened to be due.

A wonderful fellow was—and, by all accounts, still is—Frank Harris. A man of ripe experience, too. Thus, before he went to the *Candid Friend* he had edited the *Evening News*, the *Fortnightly*, and the *Saturday Review*; and after leaving the *Candid Friend* (with offices in Covent Garden), he went in turn to *Hearth and Home* and *Modern Society*. I

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am only surprised that he didn't take the *Athenæum* and the *Girl's Own Paper* in his stride. He would have assumed the editorship of either quite cheerfully, and made a good job of it, too. These once successful journals might then be still in existence, instead of being "amalgamated" with others.

I fancy—but it was difficult to keep pace with all his journalistic activities—that Harris also had a dash at *Vanity Fair* when I was writing for its columns. If so, it must have been after Oliver Fry (who followed Gibson Bowles) had left the paper. The office then moved from Essex Street to a first floor in the Strand, nearly opposite the *Globe* premises. The cashier's department was apparently lost in the move, as it was extraordinarily difficult to get any money out of the new business manager. I imagine one difficulty was that there was precious little "business" to manage.

"Well, I print your stuff, don't I?" Harris said to me one day, when I pressed him for "something on account" and couldn't get it. "What more do you want?"

When *Vanity Fair* moved from its old office in Essex Street to its new one in the Strand, Oliver Fry ceased to function as editor. Leslie Ward, however, the inimitable "Spy," continued his series of caricatures, and for which—since the letterpress was pretty poor stuff—people really bought the paper. But he did not go on with them very long. At one time he did a few for the *World*, and, later on, some of his work appeared in *Mayfair*. I knew something of

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this latter journal, as when it was founded, I became its dramatic critic. I did not, however, last long. Apparently my rather unconventional views on the Drama upset the editorial mind, for we parted early, and on terms of mutual disagreement.

Although Leslie Ward (who was very properly knighted four years ago) was born in 1851, he would easily pass for much younger. Still, where he is concerned this sort of thing is hereditary, for he comes of a distinctly juvenile family. Thus, his mother, Mrs. E. M. Ward, has been exhibiting at the Academy almost every year in succession since 1849. One of her many interests, apart from painting, is private theatricals, and I have seen several performances in her Chelsea studio. At one of them I remember a nephew of Cyril Maude making his debut. The amateurs collected by Mrs. Ward on this occasion included Miss Marjorie Bowen, who has to a rare degree the gift of writing historical romance without making it dull.

7.

Possibly because he happened to be a good thirty years older than myself, Frank Harris impressed me more than would perhaps otherwise have been the case. I think, though, it was his flood of talk that impressed me chiefly. Once fairly started (and especially when he had the genial "Tex" de Mattos to play Chorus) it was like an unchecked torrent. Harris, indeed, was quite the most talkative person I have ever encountered, and if there had been a com-

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petition for holding a non-stop monologue he would have won it against all comers. Still, there is no denying it was good talk, as he was remarkably well informed on a very large number of subjects, and possessed a fund of knowledge that was both general and particular. It is true that he talked principally of himself. As, however, this was a peculiarly congenial subject, he made it interesting.

Once when we were talking—or rather, when Harris was talking and I was listening—he declared that Irving was a Jew. I am pretty sure that Harris was (and, I presume, still is) one himself, but it had never occurred to me to think of Irving as among the Chosen People. Yet both his sons were remarkably Hebraic in appearance, especially as they got on in life. This was particularly the case with “H. B.,” the elder of the two. He started his stage career as a very fair actor, and—owing to the steady growth of his absurd mannerisms—finished it as only a moderate one. His brother Laurence, on the other hand, reversed the process, beginning as an extremely bad actor and ending as a first-class one. Three of his later performances touched the high-water mark. These were his “Comte de Maigny” in “The Lily,” his “John Luff” in “Margaret Catchpole,” and, far and away the best of all, his “Tokeramo” in “Typhoon.” I have seen a fair amount of really good acting, but very little to equal these three impersonations.

The trouble with Laurence Irving was his temper. There were moments, indeed, when it was absolutely ungovernable, and at rehearsal I have seen him reduce

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the women present to floods of tears and the men to murderous frenzy. The only other actor I ever saw lose such control of himself was Willard. He, however, generally contrived to keep it until he reached the semi-privacy of his dressing room. There, of course, it mattered very little what he did.

8.

Papers with a single directing personality in them no longer seem to make any headway. Yet there used to be several of such organs. I do not remember *Sala's Journal*, but I distinctly remember one conducted by Mrs. Arthur Stannard, who, under the pseudonym of "John Strange Winter," was considered by no less profound a critic than Ruskin to be an authority on military matters. Despite this, however, *Winter's Weekly* soon languished, and Mrs. Stannard wisely returned to her "Bootles' Baby" vein. Then there was the short-lived *Free Lance*. This might well have been called "Clement Scott's Weekly," for Scott was simply all over it, either in paragraphs or verse. The result was a curious blend of gush and gas, but, all the same, an uncommonly amusing production.

Much the best of the batch was a serious effort, *T. P.'s Weekly*. This was of a somewhat Chautauquan description, and as such, a veritable pillar of suburban "book teas" (then all the mode), and similar gatherings of culture from Mayfair to Muswell Hill. With its skilful adumbrations of current literature,

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a felt want if ever there was one, and for the life of me I could never understand why *T. P.'s Weekly* went to an early grave. Towards its latter end Holbrook Jackson had a good deal to do with the paper, and during his consulship I wrote in it myself occasionally.

But all to no purpose, and even my highbrow outpourings could not stave off the inevitable.

John O'London's Weekly now carries on the torch, and very well, too. Yet somehow I prefer the old *T. P.* Its afflatus was of a better vintage. More body in it, so to speak. Still, you cannot argue against solid success, and *John O'London's Weekly* (with Wilfrid Whitten at the helm, and Lord Riddell disseminating light and learning in snappy half-column articles) is undoubtedly successful.

9.

Talking of proprietors of journals that have passed out of existence, I once knew a curious old gentleman (long since gathered to his fathers) who ran a series of distinctly pornographic papers. Although he derived a vast income from them he was always anxious to increase it. At this particular date there happened to be a marked "boom" in "religious" journals, and fresh specimens were coming out every week. They were a paying proposition, too, since shady company-promoters and fee-snatching moneylenders gave lavish support to the advertisement columns. This being the case, the worthy (or, perhaps, unworthy)

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Jackson—as I will call him—decided to exploit this field himself. Accordingly, he summoned a directors' meeting and announced his intention.

The directors—all sharp business men—heard him wonderingly. There was much whispered consultation among them. Then one of the Board, greatly daring, found his voice and entered on a mild protest.

“This is all very well, Mr. Jackson,” he said. “Of course, a properly conducted religious journal would be extremely profitable to us. There's money in piety. But the trouble is you—er—don't know anything about religion.”

“Damm it all, gents,” returned the chairman, banging his fist down on the table. “If I don't now, I bloody soon will!”

The old rascal was as good (or as bad) as his word, and in due time appeared *Jackson's Religious Bits*, or whatever it was called. While it lasted quite a lot of money was made out of it, too.

CHAPTER XII

A MIXED BAG

Jaunts for Journalists—"Mostly Wives"—Millionaires and Manners—Carnegie and Candour—Rich Men's Economies—American Criticism—*Vers Libre* Expert—"Greatest Poet in the World"—Bard and Brandy.

1.

OCCASIONALLY the hard working journalist has a few "plums" tossed to him in the way of an enjoyable trip more or less far afield and in the interests of his paper. Sometimes there is more business than pleasure about them, but they are then probably undertaken at the instance of the Government and for a really important purpose. Thus, during the war several selected parties from Carmelite Street and elsewhere made, under War Office supervision, week-end expeditions to what they humorously called the "front." Few of the members, however, got much beyond one of the different bases. Still, they rigged themselves out with gas masks and tin hats complete; and when their inquisitive children ask what "Daddy did in the Great War," they can silence criticism by producing recognizable photographs of themselves thus accoutred.

One of these bands of what the troops rudely

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termed the "Fleet Street Fusiliers" (soldiers have next to no refinement) happened to be on board the steamer when I was returning to France from leave. I never saw anybody quite so warlike as some of them. The pity is, the Germans did not have an opportunity of seeing them as well. The party consisted of an intrepid galaxy of editors and reporters. It also included Horatio Bottomley, who had just started to tell his immense public that the "war would be over by Christmas." A cheering assertion, and one which everybody in my somewhat unpleasant part of the world just then was delighted to hear. As, however, this happened to be the Christmas of 1915, it was perhaps just as well that he did not specify which Christmas he meant. Still, I will say this for "Oratorio" Bottomley, or "Mr. Bol-Mondeley," as I have heard Compton Mackenzie call him, he was the only man of the party above military age. All the rest of them were typical *embusqués*, and the only fighting they ever did was with the Tribunal Boards. Some of this was of a really desperate character (one of their number even contracted pneumonia from waiting in the queue), and fully deserving of the O.B.E's accorded.

2.

In pre-war days I occasionally had the luck to make a press-trip myself. I was once even clever enough to induce an editor who disliked travelling to give me a free pass all the way to Wildungen, a very charming German "bad" near Cassel. It ap-

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peared that the local authorities there, finding British patronage to be slackening, wanted a "write-up," and I was offered the job. As all expenses were paid out of the Kur-tax proceeds, I took care to travel in a leisurely and comfortable fashion, and as befitting the dignity of the journal I was representing. This was a struggling monthly, but from the tremendous deference they showed me I fancy the City Fathers of Wildungen must have thought it was the *Times* at least.

It is, however, our own seaside municipalities that are most avid of Press publicity, and they attach immense importance to a few paragraphs in even quite third-rate journals. This is why we come across all the slush and gush about "Beautiful Blackpool," "Breezy Brighton," "Merry Margate," and "Popular Puddleton," etc., with which the papers are filled every summer. I have even seen the dreary mud flats of Southend described in print as the "British Riviera" (although God knows where the "Riviera Southend" may be), and several industrious journalists who are considered reputable members of their craft make a really good thing by writing such slop. The harm of the system is that the deluded public ("it's your money we want") read these glorified puffs and accept them as gospel. "It must be true," they naïvely argue, "because it's in the paper."

The pleasantest trip of this kind that fell to me had Torquay for its objective. A municipal bandstand or something of the sort was to be opened there, and a squad of Press hacks was accordingly hired to

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tell the public all about it. The party included several women journalists, and a number of my colleagues, sensibly jumping at the chance of a free excursion, also took their wives. I remember that, as we started off from Paddington, the representative of the local authorities (who travelled with us) despatched a telegram to the hotel manager at the other end. It struck me as a little curiously worded:—

“Twenty journalists, accompanied by ten ladies, mostly wives, will arrive at Torquay 4.30 p.m.”

I don't know that “mostly wives” isn't actionable.

After this interval I cannot remember every one in the party, but it is fairly certain to have included George R. Sims, who is always very much to the fore on such occasions. A bright and amusing person with us told me that he was “on” the *Daily Express*, and would have led me to imagine he was the editor at least if I had not known Ralph Blumenfeld. As a matter of fact, he was a restaurant cook, and the gifted author of a most attractive series of recipes then appearing on the woman's page. The man I knew best in the batch was a member of the staff of the *Morning Advertiser*. As representing the accredited organ of Bung, he very properly took a keen professional interest in the alcoholic supply. There was no lack of this from the moment we left London until we returned again three days later.

Our reception at Torquay was almost “royal.” His Worship the Mayor and entire Town Council (in robes of office complete) met us on the platform, and I am not sure that we were not escorted by a guard

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of honour of boy scouts and girl guides strewing flowers along the pathway to the hotel where accommodation had been reserved for us. We were made extremely comfortable there (the "mostly wives" awkwardness being soon smoothed out by a tactful manager) and provided with an unending round of banquets and amusements during our three days' visit. It probably cost a pretty penny. Still, I think the ratepayers, who footed the bill, had sound value in return. Any way, my conscience was clear, for I wrote quite an epic account of the "municipal enterprise," and my colleagues followed suit with others on "Dainty Devon," and "Tempting Torquay," etc.

3.

My lines have not fallen among millionaires and men of wealth. Far from it. Still, I don't in the least regret the fact, for I always reflect that such people have made their money by the dirty process of underpaying and overcharging. Short of discovering a lump of radium, there is no other method of getting really rich.

From time to time I have come across a few extremely wealthy men, but only one millionaire. This was Andrew Carnegie, to whom a friend of his, stopping in the same hotel, introduced me simply because he happened to come up to us while we were talking together.

My acquaintance with Carnegie did not last more than ten minutes at the most. He struck me as a

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domineering old man, with no thoughts removed any great distance beyond the acquisition of money and power. Also, I never came across anybody so full of questions. The fact that we had only just met, and were not at all likely ever to see one another again, did not curb his inquisitiveness in the least. His questions to me ranged over all sorts of subjects. He wanted to know how much money I made, and why I didn't make more; if 4s. 6d. wasn't an "outrageous" price to pay for a pair of gloves; if I thought women were getting "more forward"; if poets (with the honourable exception of those who came from Scotland) were not "feckless bodies"; and a score of other problems to which, in schoolmaster fashion, he demanded a prompt answer and one that should square with his own preconceived views. I think he had the impression (commonly held by rich men who, by their own exertions, have risen from nothing) that not to agree with him was an act of *lèse majesté*, and, as such, almost to call for police interference.

This was the result of merely ten minutes' acquaintance with Carnegie. Perhaps if I had known him for, say, a quarter of an hour, I would have altered my views.

There is one story about Carnegie which I have always liked. Yet, oddly enough, and although it redounds to his credit as a man of sense who knew his own mind and detested humbug, each of his biographers has given it a miss.

According to this characteristic anecdote, Carnegie once received a letter stating that an old schoolfellow

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of his had fallen on evil days; that although sixty years had passed since they were boys together, it was possible that he still remembered him, and that doubtless he would be glad to subscribe to a fund that was being raised for his benefit, and so on, and so on, in the approved style of such epistles.

Now the ordinary rich man in Carnegie's position would have written back to the effect that, while he had a very high opinion of the person for whom his help was thus solicited, and deeply sympathized with his unmerited misfortunes, the many calls upon his own purse made it quite impossible for him to render any financial assistance; and would probably also have added that the committee raising the proposed testimonial would have his earnest prayers for their success, etc., etc.

Not so Andrew Carnegie. He was a man of candour, and had a healthy contempt for all such typical camouflage and soft-sawder. Accordingly, he replied quite bluntly:—

“I remember yon fellow you mention. I ken him fine. We were at school together. I detested him then, and I detest him now, and I won't give him a bawbee.”

Not soothing, perhaps. Still, at any rate straightforward, and as such highly commendable in this age of hypocrisy and cant.

An extremely rich man whom I knew intimately was a certain colliery proprietor. He had an income of well over £100,000 a year, and it used to make me quite unhappy to reflect that every time I put a lump

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of coal on my fire I was putting a shilling into his bulging pocket. Despite his vast wealth, however, he was a miserable fellow really (as is proved by the fact that he eventually blew out his brains), and also an extraordinary mixture of generosity and meanness. As to his generosity, he delighted in filling his beautiful country house with parties of hard-up young writers and artists, who, for the time being, would live on the fat of the land; and to make his hospitality still more appreciated, his invitations were always accompanied by a first-class return ticket. I would strongly recommend this pleasing trait to other hosts who want to play Mæcenas, for there is no getting over the fact that an expensive railway fare is often at the back of an unaccepted invitation. In these hard times the average young man or woman simply cannot afford a country house visit when the journey alone runs away with a five-pound note at least.

As to my friend's pronounced meanness in small things, I once unwittingly became the object of his wrath. We had been out motoring together, and when about three miles from the house on the way back the car broke down with a bad puncture. After grumbling bitterly at the "expense," my host decided to return by rail, and asked me to get a couple of tickets. I did so, and pushed him into the train, which we caught by the skin of our teeth and just as it was moving off.

The next moment he started up with a cry of anguish.

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"By God!" he exclaimed, "we're in a first class carriage."

"That's all right," I answered soothingly. "I've got the tickets."

"You don't mean to say you've actually bought first-class tickets," he protested. "Utterly preposterous! I only hope you can afford them. Everybody knows that I always travel third on this line."

Thereupon he sulked bitterly for the rest of the fifteen minutes' journey, utterly refusing to be comforted.

And this from a man who held a first-class season ticket from London to Bath.

Another wealthy individual of my acquaintance, but with very different characteristics, was one named Algernon Goldberg. He lived in Park Lane, and I need scarcely say that he had come there via Palestine. His appearance was not entirely prepossessing. Thus he was short and fat, and had a hooked nose and crimped hair. Still, his cardiac organ was quite in the right place, and he was full of generous impulses and genuinely delighted in showing hospitality.

I met him first at a country hotel. This not being so full of his compatriots as such resorts usually are, he seemed a bit lonely, and for some reason made friendly overtures towards myself. We would go out for walks together and explore old furniture shops in the district. His formula, on entering one of these establishments and accosting the proprietor, was always the same:—

"You the manager? Right. Want to look round

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and buy something. Needn't be afraid. Lots of money. Little man. Jew. Name of Goldberg."

But if the Gentiles thought they were going to put it across him on this account they were sadly mistaken in their man. Goldberg knew the proper value of the old furniture, just as he did that of old clothes. He was always ready to give a fair price, and never ready to give an unfair one.

"Your people always think they're entitled to do us down," he said to me pathetically. "We're expected to grin and bear it. When we try to get a bit of our own back, though, it's another story."

4.

I once knew a very rich poet. It sounds incredible, I admit. Still, let me hasten to explain that this individual's wealth was not derived from poetry, but from the ownership of a very flourishing dairy business. As for his poetry (alleged), this was quite the worst ever produced—or I am no judge of the subject. His Muse took the now fashionable and convenient form of *vers libre*, and was thus absolutely unfettered by ordinary considerations of metre or sense or rhyme. The natural result was a remarkable mixture of Walt Whitman and nightmare. But the gifted author was immensely proud of it, and readily paid printers and publishers to put it between book covers. He even went further in the cause he had at heart, and cheerfully handed over good money to an industrious friend of mine to see his volume "through the press"

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for him. Accordingly, it is sad to think that when, after all this, "Poppies Of Passion"—or whatever the name of the enshrined result—burst upon a waiting world, the reviewers were nothing less than ribald about it.

But Wilberforce Muggins (as I will call him) was a sound philosopher, if a perfectly dreadful poet, and bore his rebuff with equanimity.

"The public are doped," he declared, "with all this old-fashioned stuff that's been handed out to 'em by Tennyson and the other duds. They don't know real poetry. They're not educated up to it yet."

An unfounded, but none the less, a philosophical view that stood him in good stead.

Still, honour where honour is due. Any way, the aspiring bard once received a press cutting (I saw it myself) all the way from New York. In this the reviewer actually recorded it as his considered opinion of my gifted friend that "I would rather have written the exquisite lyric, 'Caryatides En Casserole' (p. 14) than have built Brooklyn Bridge."

Distinctly one up, this!

But American reviewers and critics often have curious ways of expressing themselves. Thus, in referring to Forbes-Robertson's well-known performance of "The Stranger" in Jerome's "Passing of the Third Floor Back," one of them remarked: "He did everything except walk on the waters!" Of another English actor, appearing in Hamlet, the same authority declared: "He played the King as if his partner had just played the Ace!"

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Whatever its faults, American criticism is always readable.

If the soaring Wilberforce did not manage to climb very far up Parnassus, he had his other triumphs. At any rate, he became a full-fledged member of the Poets' Club—there really is such an organization (I belong to it myself)—and also of several of the lesser literary coteries. The trouble with him in these gatherings was that his new Muse was chiefly inspired by old brandy; and since he had almost unlimited means, he could afford to indulge himself, even at the present wicked prices.

As Mrs. Poet, knowing his little weakness, very properly kept the key of the cellar and severely rationed him in the matter of alcohol, the wily fellow—with a cunning that is (or ought to be) foreign to the nature of a poet—hit on a novel scheme. This was to establish a series of *caches* in various shops where he dealt. These he stocked with a large supply of stimulants, so that when away from the family mansion he could always quench his thirst, irrespective of regulations as to closing, and without having to enter a bar. One such *cache* was at a hatter's, a second at a chemist's, a third at a tobacconist's, and a fourth at a tailor's. Since the proprietors of these establishments were thus incurring a considerable risk by lending themselves to this dubious device, he had to compensate them handsomely.

Although extremely generous and good-hearted, there is no getting over the fact that when he had too much brandy inside him—which was his chronic state

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--this *vers libre* expert tended to become a public nuisance. Thus, he would think nothing of declaiming his horrible efforts in a restaurant (the overwrought manager of the Savoy once asked me to take him away and lose him), and bellowing at the top of his voice, "I'm the greatest poet in the world!"

On another memorable occasion, when he was, to use his own expression, "oiled," he was requested by the anguished committee to leave a small club where he had interrupted a thrilling lecture on "Rhetoric as Applied to Prosody" delivered by a fellow member. Thereupon he lurched unsteadily out of the room, locked the door, and pitched the key out of the window. Pure playfulness, of course. Still, just a bit awkward for those of us who wanted to get back to our Clapham fastnesses the same evening.

The next time I acted as sponsor for this quaint merchant was the last. There were limits even to my forbearance. What happened was that, at his earnest request, I took him to a minor theatrical club. As it was Christmas time he was in an even more benevolent mood than usual, and was simply overflowing with friendship for everyone present. His great big heart, he said, bled for the unfortunate young actresses out of a job, and to show practical sympathy with their sufferings he walked round the room thrusting treasury notes upon them. It was kindly meant, of course, and quite sensibly received in this spirit. However, he made his gifts just a little embarrassing by loudly remarking to each fair recipient, "Look here, my dear, this is simply a Christ-

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mas present for you. I don't want anything sexual in return!"

The last I heard of the well-meaning Wilberforce Muggins was that Mrs. Poet (to the distress of a vast number of touts, tradesmen, and confidence tricksters, all of whom had made a very good thing out of him in London) took him to America. Apparently, enforced prohibition there agreed with him so badly that, when he was refused a passport to return to England, he was committed to a lunatic asylum, via an inebriates' home.

But then, poets—especially those of the *vers libre* brand—never do seem to be quite normal. They must not be judged by the ordinary standards.

CHAPTER XIII

PERSONS AND PLACES

A Practical Playwright—Two Strings to his Bow—An Art Connoisseur—Nouveaux Riches—Some Women Writers—A Stage “Double”—Literary Activity—Copyright Performance—The Undress Drama—Musical Comedy and its Makers.

1.

RICH men often have their small economies. Perhaps this is how they become rich. I knew one wealthy individual who always, and deliberately, smoked twopenny cigars. The choicer threepenny variety never really appealed to him. This, of course, was in happy (and distant) pre-war days, when such brands were obtainable. Still, even at the present profiteering time his top price is sixpence, but he keeps the address of the obliging tobacconist a jealously guarded secret. His theory was very sound. “Smoking cigars at all,” he pointed out, “is a purely acquired taste. When I resolved to form it—so as to cut a dash among important people at literary dinners—I decided to begin with the cheapest sort obtainable. It was horribly unpleasant. Still, I persevered, and in time got used to it. The result is, a Salmon and Gluckstein’s twopenny Flor de Cabago is now the same to me as an imported Corona at a shilling an inch.”

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Although he is not exactly a millionaire, Somerset Maugham is certainly a wealthy man, and has, moreover, the honourable and rare distinction of having made his quite considerable fortune entirely by his own efforts. After Barrie, he is probably—not excepting Pinero—the all-British dramatist who has had more financial success than any other playwright of the present generation.

When I first knew Somerset Maugham (whose front name, by the way, happens to be William), he was living in some very modest chambers at the back of Victoria Street. He had not then started on the path which led him to the position he now enjoys and adorns. Yet, although Success deliberately refused to knock at his doors in those days, he wrote indefatigably. He had a big box full of unacted plays which went the rounds, and returned on his hands, with wearying persistency. The Postmaster-General, indeed, must have found him quite a profitable customer.

Before he began his dramatic work at all, Maugham was a diligent student of the Stage. At this period we often went to plays together, but I doubt if we ever sat anywhere but in the pit or gallery. There were two good reasons for this. The first was that neither of us had any great amount of money to spare; and the second was that there was always a larger public in these parts of the house than in the stalls and dress circle; and the largest public was the one for which Maugham definitely meant to write.

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Like many other clever people, Somerset Maugham has a second string to his bow. It is that of producing novels of outstanding ability. A matter of individual taste, but it is the one I happen to prefer.

Maugham once explained to me his whole system of writing successful plays.

"First of all," he said, "make quite sure you have a story to tell. Then tell it. Then stop. The thing to avoid above all others is wandering away from the point and becoming diffused. If the audience get fogged and don't know what the devil you're driving at, you are not really cut out for a dramatist. Accordingly, abandon play writing, and take up some other line of business."

Sound advice. Unfortunately, though, most people discover it too late.

As with practically every one who has ever done anything worth doing, the future dramatist had a good many rebuffs, not only at the start, but afterwards as well. Once, when the thick-headed theatrical managers had put up a more persistent barrage of rejections than usual, he applied for a certain secretarial job that happened to be going. Not knowing that he was after it, I also submitted an application in my best handwriting, and, to my astonishment, got the post. I don't think the loss was Maugham's. Certainly, it wasn't that of the Stage.

2.

The individual to whom I thus became "temporary secretary and literary advisor" was a distinctly

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curious one. He called himself a Dane, but, and in the cold light of future developments, I fancy he was really a German. Apparently, he was full of money, for when I first saw him he was living in great style at the Savoy; when I last saw him, however, he was defendant in some very unsavoury legal proceedings, and out of which he emerged very badly. His name was Gretz (or something uncommonly near it), and although he talked good English, he wrote it indifferently. As his ostensible occupation was compiling an art book, he wanted somebody to express his views in more or less literary form. This was why he required what he called a "secretary"; and it became my job to spend several hours a day writing voluminous screeds from his dictation.

Occasionally there was some little trouble—due to my employer's imperfect command of English—over the work. Once, when he had obstinately insisted on referring to something that he called a "faunness," and which I—for want of a better term—reproduced as "female faun," he got quite annoyed.

"If there is no 'faunness' in your so horrible language," he declared, "it is enough that I—the celebrated Gretz—make such a word and present it to you."

It was Napoleonic, of course. Still, it was scarcely satisfactory. All the same, I never heard that the readers of his volume made any great objection. Besides, the printed volume contained some much more uncouth expressions.

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I think this merchant, who was certainly a connoisseur, really did know something about pictures; and I fancy he was also a dealer on behalf of Dr. Bode, of Berlin, and other European experts. Any way, Semitic and smartly-dressed representatives from Bond Street galleries used to bring him canvases nearly every day, and when he visited their hook-nosed principals at their own haunts, he was always received with tremendous deference. On one of these picture-hunting expeditions we went down to Tankerville Chamberlain's country house together, to look at his Romneys.

The enterprising Gretz certainly knew a lot of people whose names loom large in the "society" columns of the morning papers, and was always giving big luncheon and dinner parties. I frequently found myself included among the guests on these occasions, and thus had the (for me) rare opportunity of putting my legs under the mahogany—or whatever took its place—of the Berkeley, Carlton, Ritz and Claridge's, etc., as our host was very particular about his surroundings.

Among the friends of his, whom I met at dinner one night, was a big genial-tempered German, who talked guttural English, and struck me, from his conversation, as having an amazingly intimate knowledge of our Foreign Office. Also, he seemed to know everybody in London. At the moment—for, and as generally happens, the introductions were merely mumbled—I did not catch his name. The next morning, however, I learned that the affable and

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well-informed stranger was Baron von Eckardstein, then accredited to the Embassy in Carlton House Terrace.

Baron von Eckardstein had married, not so long previously, a daughter of Blundell Maple, a wealthy Tottenham Court Road furniture manufacturer. The marriage, however, was not a success—a clash of temperaments, perhaps—and was soon dissolved. From what I heard of it from mutual friends, the Teutonic bridegroom's attitude towards his father-in-law was anything but conciliatory, even at the outset. His customary reference to him, indeed (and perhaps in his pride at being so "hoch-geboren" himself), was "that ——— tradesman!" The term "Hun" had not then been invented. Had it been so, Blundell Maple, who was also addicted to the use of plain speech, would probably have applied it to his son-in-law in return. Under these distressing circumstances, and as may be imagined, the harmony which had started with the wedding march and orange blossoms complete was soon succeeded by the discord of legal proceedings.

Mention of Blundell Maple, who, like most rich tradesmen, prepared to spend money on his party, duly received a baronetcy, reminds one of his friend the meteoric Colonel North. The two had much in common, and were always together. Nobody quite knew—and his acquaintances were much too tactful to ask—how North (otherwise the "Nitrate King") became a "colonel" at all. Still, he had promoted

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so many companies in his time, that the generally accepted theory was that he had also promoted himself. While he and Maple were excellent friends, they were, none the less, fond of cracking jokes at each others' expense. Touching this matter, there is a story to the effect that once, when the "colonel" was giving a dinner party at Eltham, and seeking to impress his guests (mostly collected from blue-blooded, but impecunious hangers-on), the Tottenham Court Road potentate greeted him with the remark "Hullo, North, how are nitrates?"

"Quite all right, thank you," was the ready response. "How are ——?" specifically naming a domestic utensil which, while included in Maple's bedroom suites, is not generally mentioned in polite society.

By the way, North, who used to be held up to young men like myself as an example of the "evils of speculating," managed to leave more than half a million behind him when he left this world for the next one. It would have been a still larger sum, if he had not been shamelessly bled by the host of people who lived on his bounty, borrowed his money, and then laughed at his vulgarity. As he fancied himself as a picture collector and a racing man, he was—despite his shrewdness in ordinary commercial matters—a ready prey to any designing rascal who wanted to sell him a factory-made daub as an "old Master" or a broken down horse as a prospective "Derby winner."

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3.

I don't seem to have known many women novelists. Still, and like most people, I have met a fair number of them casually at dinners and receptions, etc. Any way, I have more than once had two fingers from Mrs. Humphry Ward, and three from Mrs. St. Leger Harrison. At one time, I also happened to see a good deal of "George Egerton," whose third husband is Golding Bright, the dramatic agent. In the "Nineties" she was one of the big guns of the Bodley Head battery, when her "Keynotes" (since followed by a dozen other well-known novels) made a tremendous sensation in the literary salons of West Kensington, being thought frightfully emancipated and "daring"; and I also used to come across Elizabeth Robins, who (as "C. E. Raimond"), achieved some stir with "The Magnetic North," and several other books of good intent. Miss Robins, who adds histrionic to her literary ability, is particularly well-known in America. So much so, indeed, is this the case, that I was once commissioned by the proprietor of *Munsey's Magazine* to secure an interview with her.

Of the literary women who write under their own names, the only ones I can claim to have known at all (and some of them but very slightly), are Mrs. B. M. Croker, Mrs. Harold Gorst, Mrs. Belloc Lowndes, Mrs. Perrin, Mrs. Dawson Scott and Miss Sheila Kaye-Smith, together with just a few others. Of the younger women writers, those producing far and away the best work are Sheila Kaye-

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Smith and Marjorie Bowen. What strikes one about the work of the former, is that she can fasten upon a subject that is intrinsically uninteresting to most people, and yet, by dint of sheer cleverness, lift it to a really considerable plane of interest. As a case in point, take her "Tamarisk Town," which is simply the chronicle of the rise and fall of a two-penny-halfpenny seaside resort—or her "Sussex Gorse" and "Green Apple Harvest"—with plough boys and bumpkins for protagonists. Marjorie Bowen's strong suit is historical romance, into which she infuses a real glow. A very fine example of this is her "Glen O' Weeping," which competent critics are always prepared to rate above her better known "Viper of Milan."

Mrs. Perrin, who writes far and away the best Indian stories of any woman (and, for that matter, of most men), has a very large circle of friendship and acquaintanceship with the writing world; and, assembled in her pleasant drawing room, I have found people at such opposite poles as Richard Pryce, Temple Thurston and Hugh Walpole. Temple Thurston's first wife, whom I knew slightly, was a brilliant novelist. Her technique was so remarkable, that she had the unique experience of seeing her "John Chilcote" (a high-class "thriller") serialized in both "Blackwood" and the *Daily Mail*. This, I imagine, has constituted a record. The book was subsequently dramatized by her husband, and the result produced at the St. James's by George Alexander. I was present on the first night. There was

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a thick fog outside, and some of it seemed to have got into the plot.

From the outset the production was instinct with difficulties that would have caused the average manager to throw it up in despair, and, before worse happened, forfeit any option he had paid. To begin with, the leading part was an exceptionally difficult one to cast. This was because the exigencies of the plot made it absolutely imperative that Alexander (who had apparently not discovered the fact when he accepted the play), should be provided with an exact "double," and not a mere wig and grease-paint copy of himself. For weeks on end London was scoured by his emissaries to find such a person. Pubs and clubs were sedulously dredged, and long strings of hopeful candidates presented themselves daily at the stage door of the St. James's, but all to no purpose. As a matter of fact (and one of which he is probably quite unaware), Temple Thurston rather owes it to me that his piece was ever produced at all.

What happened was that just as Alexander—despairing of ever securing a suitable man—was about to drop the whole idea, I sent him somebody of whom he approved. It was pure chance, but I suddenly remembered that a certain acquaintance of mine really did bear a most remarkable resemblance to the St. James's lessee. This was Walter Thorold, at that time London editor of the *Smart Set*, an ultra-American magazine attempting to establish itself in this country. There were only two things against him. One was that he hadn't the very smallest idea

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of acting (or even any ambition for histrionic triumphs), and the other was that, a Canadian by birth, he possessed an extraordinarily pronounced "twang." These two drawbacks, when taken together, rather militated against the play's chance of success, and its career was short. Apart from this, candour compels me to add that "John Chilcote" was a very bad play. Temple Thurston, however, has since shown, in his "Wandering Jew" and various other pieces, that he is a dramatist of distinct promise.

To get back to Mrs. Perrin, of whom I was writing a moment ago. One day when I happened to be present her new novel "Idolatry" had just appeared. It was a book of the moment, and was being talked about a good deal. During a sudden pause, a very young man who was in the room, wishing to make himself agreeable, and at the same time to show that he knew what his hostess was doing, blandly remarked, "I hear that you've just written a book on adultery."

4.

It is, I fancy, in Viscountess Rhondda's drawing-room that I have seen more women writers to the square inch than anywhere else. On one occasion, when she was running an ambitious weekly paper called *Time and Tide* (and which, for all I know to the contrary, she may be doing still), she hospitably gave a reception to all the contributors *en masse*. As I happened to be among the number (you may not think it, but I have a very refined style when required), I duly received a card. The great majority

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of the distinguished company present belonged to the sex of their hostess. Everybody was very friendly, and, although we none of us knew one another and were not introduced, the mere fact that we had all glittered in the columns of *Time and Tide*, was (and very properly) held to be a common ground for acquaintance. This fortuitous circumstance gave me the opportunity (which would otherwise never have occurred) of exchanging opinions with clever people like Miss Ciceley Hamilton and Miss Rebecca West, and numerous others whose work I had hitherto only admired from a distance.

"Reference Miss Rebecca West," as all the best stylists put it when composing business letters, this accomplished writer probably has a larger output than any other woman journalist. Her work appears almost everywhere, and it is difficult to take up a paper of repute without coming across her signature either at the top or at the bottom (and often at both ends) of a column. She and Chesterton, indeed, would seem to share the honours of what in commercial circles is known as "display."

This circumstance calls to mind a story told me by a journalistic acquaintance, himself a regular contributor to most of the journals that count for anything. He had written one of his bright articles, and wished to find a good home for it. Full of this whimsical idea, he sallied forth into Fleet Street and penetrated into the first newspaper office that he saw there.

The editor expressed his gratitude at being called upon (this is my informant's statement, not mine)

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when he was exceedingly busy, and read his proffered contribution at once. When he had finished, he handed it back with a sigh of regret.

"This is good stuff," he said. "Full of up-lift, too. Elevating, and all that sort of thing as well. I'm most frightfully sorry I can't use it, but the fact is I've just purchased a long series from G. K. Chesterton and Miss Rebecca West. Now, you try the *Super Review*. They'll simply jump at it."

But, alas, the call upon this celebrated organ of public opinion was also unpropitious. The gifted editor in charge there read the article through from beginning to end, straight down each page, and from left to right of each paragraph, and with inspiring gurgles of obvious satisfaction. Then he sighed even more heavily than had his colleague.

"This is really excellent," he declared. "Something quite out of the common, and so forth and so on. Unfortunately, though, I can't possibly accept it, as only this morning I ordered enough stuff from G. K. Chesterton and Miss Rebecca West to last me six months. Take my tip and offer this to the *Weekly Signal*. Say I sent you. It won't do any particular harm."

At the office of this third periodical the industrious scribe saw a lady in the editorial chair. She received him with immense politeness, read the contribution through twice, and praised it highly. In fact, she appeared to like it so much that she even started to read it all over again. But at the mention by the hopeful author of the important word "acceptance" she shook her head.

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"It's most unfortunate," she protested, "that you didn't bring this along yesterday. I'd have used it like a shot then. Now, however, it's quite impossible to do so. You see, I've just bought a lot of work from Mr. G. K. Chesterton. The result is—er——"

"But surely," returned the other, forgetting his manners so far as to interrupt, "you're not leaving out Miss Rebecca West?"

The lady looked at him a little curiously.

"I'm not," she replied. "As it happens, I am Miss Rebecca West."

5.

Mrs. Harold Gorst, whom I mentioned just now, combines with an ability to write admirable novels of "low" life (of her "This Our Sister" and "The Soul of Milly Green," brand), a disposition of pronounced amiability and a readiness to help in the cause of Art. I once, however, unwittingly put this to a somewhat severe test. What happened was that an ambitious and well-endowed poet of my acquaintance had commissioned me, as an expert, to arrange a copyright performance of a blank verse tragedy of his in about ten acts. Mrs. Gorst, volunteering to assist in the good work, I cast her for the lead, the part she was to sustain being that of an Egyptian maiden called Leonora. I forget the names of most of the other people who helped me on this memorable occasion, but Irene Rooke—an extremely talented actress—"read" one part, and Edward Morton also obliged in similar fashion.

Then, having—by dint of bribes and secret influ-

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ence—secured the use of a theatre for an afternoon, I summoned the company. Out of sheer carelessness, I had not looked at the leading part—thinking it was the same sort of highbrow nonsense as all the others in this deathless drama. Nor, for this matter, had Mrs. Gorst troubled to read it herself.

This was our undoing.

Half way through the opening act the leading lady had to make her first entrance. Yet, despite the cue being given by the impatient author, who hung on every word that was uttered as if it were so much Shakespeare, she stopped in the wings and declined to budge.

“Come on, please,” bellowed the prompter.

“I think not,” was the calm, but emphatic, reply.

“Why not?” demanded the author. “What on earth is the matter with you?”

“Well,” said Mrs. Gorst, “I didn’t realize before that this was written by Oscar Asche.”

“Oscar Asche?” exclaimed the indignant dramatist. “What do you mean?”

“I’ve only just looked at the part,” was the response, “and I see the stage directions say, ‘*Enter Leonora, perfectly nude.*’ Anything to oblige you, of course, but even for Art’s sake I’m not prepared to go that length.”

Edward Morton, to whom I referred just now in connection with this thrilling (but so far unproduced) drama, was a warm-hearted and very able journalist with hosts of friends, and was at that time theatrical critic of the *Referee*. He was also—so far as went

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the "book" (which was no great distance)—the author of "San Toy," which ran for two years at Daly's. In addition to this achievement, the English libretto of the still more popular "Merry Widow" was ascribed to him. There was, however, a somewhat acrimoniously conducted dispute on the subject, as the authorship was also claimed by various other people, among them being Basil Hood. But this was not surprising, for the authorship of the "book" of a musical comedy is always shrouded in impenetrable mystery. Heaven alone knows why—except, of course, for the sake of the substantial money involved—anybody should want to have such deplorable bilge attributed to him. Personally, I fancy Morton really did have a good deal to do with this one. Any way, George Edwardes paid him a considerable sum on account of it, and Edwardes was certainly not in the habit of spending money without value received.

A sound working rule.

CHAPTER XIV

VARIATIONS

“Laughter in Court”—Life in the Temple—A Reasonable Charge—
Law and Letters—The “Comic” Press—Cash and Chops—“Dead
Periodicals”—A Change for the Better.

1.

I HAVE not (so far) had anything to do with the Law and its practice; and, unless some of the individuals not mentioned in this book consider that they have been morally and materially injured by being left out of it, and on this account instruct their solicitors to bring an action for damages against me, I shall probably still continue on its safe side. But I have always been extremely interested in the proceedings of the Courts, and have spent hours upon hours listening to cases being argued. The criminal side is the one in which I find the greatest appeal, and the drama unfolded almost every day of the current sessions at the Old Bailey is to me infinitely more absorbing than anything the Stage can offer. Also, it has the further advantage of being entirely free to the spectators.

Having an extensive acquaintance with all sorts of people, I happened to know one of the Old Bailey judges. The result was, I could always get a preferential seat alongside Counsel, instead of, like ordi-

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nary individuals, having to take my chance in the crowded gallery. It is a privilege of which I have repeatedly availed myself.

Of the different Courts where the grim business of the Old Bailey is carried on, the one in which Sir Charles Darling happens to be presiding at the moment always attracts the biggest public. There are two reasons for this. The first is that this judge usually manages to try the most interesting cases in the calendar, and the second is that he has the reputation for being a wit. His justs, however, are seldom very rib-rending, and the last time I was in Court and noticed the roof, it did not seem in need of repair. Yet Darling is an accepted humorist. The result is, the public, as well as everybody else—from the jurymen even to the unfortunate prisoners in the dock—punctuate his most ordinary remarks with shrieks of merriment; stolid ushers and policemen and sycophantic barristers smirk deferentially, and reporters duly chronicle, “Laughter in Court!”

To my mind, this stereotyped phrase, “Laughter in Court!” always rings unpleasantly, and even strikes me as something of a reflection upon the individual of whom it is written. Whatever the be-wigged and be-robed figure on the Bench may think to the contrary, the dignity of Justice (and all the more especially in a criminal trial) is not really enhanced by an assumption of the cap-and-bells of the buffoon. As a matter of fact, the precise opposite is the case.

Still, and to be fair to Darling (“Little Darling,” as he used to be known on circuit), his average jests

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are infinitely better than the ponderous efforts laboriously delivered by other judges. He is credited, too, with cracking at least one really good specimen. The point that cropped up on this occasion was the difference between the Coliseum and the Trocadero.

"So far as I recollect from my reading," he observed blandly, "the Coliseum was a place in Ancient Rome where the Christians fed the lions. The Trocadero, however, appears to be a place in Modern London where the Lyons feed the Christians."

This time the familiar caption, "Laughter in Court!" did happen to be merited.

2.

From the Law Courts to the Temple is a natural transition. It is, moreover, a place I have known intimately. As a matter of fact, I have even lived there, and in my experience there are few spots in London where it is pleasanter to have a set of chambers. Take, to begin with, the situation. A bit of a step from Park Lane and Grosvenor Square, perhaps, but uncommonly handy for those other and less exalted districts where, after all, most of us have our business, and not too far from theatreland and clubdom. Then there is the atmosphere. This is unique. Despite its proximity to the bustling Strand and maelstrom of Fleet Street, there is, nevertheless, an air of quiet and dignified repose—almost a cloistered calm, in fact—about the Temple. It is not, however, entirely cloistered, for petticoats as well as barristers'

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gowns are to be seen on the winding stairs, and there are even married couples with babies complete sheltering under its roof trees.

On the *lucus a non lucendo* principle, presumably, the charwomen who clean one's chambers in the Temple (or are employed to do so) are generically termed "laundresses." These ancient dames (many of whom are grandmothers) have certain jealously-guarded customs and traditions going back into the distant past. Taking them all round, they are faithful and hard-working and scrupulously honest, and well worth the modest wage they receive.

As I have a constitutional dislike to doing anything resembling work myself, I used to give my laundress a certain sum every week, with instructions to get in such supplies as were wanted, and render me a detailed statement. The laboriously written out account furnished me on Saturdays was always wrong (when compared with the tradesmen's receipted bills) in respect of items and totals, but the change was invariably correct to a farthing.

The worthy soul who ministered to my simple wants had a peculiar system of accountancy. Thus, once when I told her to do some cleaning for a woman friend of mine on the same staircase, who had gone away for the week-end, and include it in my own bill, she submitted her budget as follows:—

"Sir, to scrubbing Miss Smith as per your orders, 1s. 6d."

As it seemed fairly reasonable, I let it pass.

Among the more agreeable amenities of residence

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in the Temple is the run of the garden. The glorious turf, of Elizabethan origin, nearly perished under the martial enthusiasm of sturdy patriots (National Volunteers), who drilled there during the war, but it is now slowly recovering. At any rate, the well-grown elms still stand, and offer a grateful shade. On fine summer afternoons there are few pleasanter spots in the heart of London in which to saunter, and—human nature being sadly imperfect—an added satisfaction is derived from the thought that the envious public can only peer at one from the protecting railings. At such times, too, eminent members of the Bar and their friends can be seen playing tennis, or merely strolling and chatting together under the trees, planning to make the world better and brighter, or engaged in some other equally commendable pursuit. By the way, Dean Inge (who is not nearly so “gloomy” as he is said to be by assiduous paragraphers in the comic papers), is a staunch supporter of the Temple Tennis Club.

The Temple, both Inner and Middle, still has its literary associations. They don't amount to much nowadays, certainly. No Lambs or Goldsmiths among them now, or, if so, not markedly articulate. Yet there is quite a fair sprinkling of, at any rate, bookish men, together with a considerable leavening of such small fry as essayists, novelists and journalists, plus a stray poet or two, scattered about among its hundreds of residents. Until his death last year, F. C. Philips was probably the best known of any of them.

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F. C. Philips was a man who had had a remarkable career, and in half a dozen different directions. Thus, he started life as a subaltern in what novelists always call a "marching regiment." Getting tired of the Army, he "sent in his papers" (another cliché) and went to the Bar. Although—for he was an adaptable fellow, and with any amount of brains—he built up a good practice in record time, he soon dropped the Law, and transferred his activities, first to Literature, and then to the Stage. As an author, he turned out a vast list of novels and stories, and, moreover, made a good deal of money by them. With the exception, however, of his "As in a Looking Glass" (which originally appeared getting on for forty years ago), none of these books is ever heard of nowadays. Yet lots of them were "best-sellers" in their time, and ran through a positively mouth-watering number of editions.

But it was the Stage that really held pride of place in Philips's affections. He was always taking theatres, and always making and losing money in the process. As there was a prejudice against theatrical management when he first took it up, he temporarily adopted the name of "Fairlie," and joined forces with an astute Hebrew. The result of his inexperience at the start was, of course, inevitable. It gave birth, indeed, to the Byronic jape—"What is Philips's partner doing now? Oh, he's doing fairly."

Still, when Philips cut himself adrift, he soon recouped his losses. He also made a great deal of money by writing successful plays. Judging by the

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more exacting modern standards, they were pretty bad plays. Yet they suited their period well enough, and, as a result, their author piled up an enviably big bank balance. What he did with his money, however, is a mystery, for in his last few years he never seemed to have a halfpenny with which to bless himself. When I knew him, he had fallen on very evil days indeed, and was glad to pick up a casual guinea by doing mere hack work. At this time I often used to see his distinctly down-at-heel, pathetic figure, shambling through Middle Temple Lane every evening (we lived almost next door to one another), on the way to dine frugally at the Cock. There are tragedies in the Temple, as elsewhere. Life there is not all fat briefs and solicitors' clerks scattering large fees. How some of its community manage to live at all I have never been able to discover.

Towards his latter days Philips, like a good many other men who had lived a somewhat rapid past, "got religion" to a very pronounced extent. He bitterly bemoaned the fact that he had wasted his opportunities and been a "bad man" (quite unfounded), and assured everyone who would listen to him that, instead of being booked for bliss, he would certainly find himself finishing up in the less attractive portion of the next world. The idea became a veritable monomania with him, especially as his health grew worse.

One day the poor old man had his overcoat stolen. He was exceedingly bitter about it, and used very strong language on the subject, declaring that the loss would kill him.

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"Cheer up," said a sympathetic friend. "You won't want your coat long."

"Why not?" demanded Philips.

"Because you always say you'll be dead in a month, and are certain to go to hell."

By the way, Philips was often said to be the original of Anstey's "Giant's Robe." Still, I don't think there was a word of truth in the contention. For one thing, charges of plagiarism are much too easily brought against authors; and, for another, Philips was quite clever enough to write novels without anybody else's help.

Of literary men in the Temple nowadays, the best known is perhaps Sir James Frazer, in Brick Court. The distinguished author of the "Golden Bough" has Israel Zangwill for his neighbour, in Hare Court; and a host of industrious reviewers and critics and press-men generally have their eyries in King's Bench Walk and Paper Buildings, etc. There is even a publisher among them to give the colony something of an uplift. I have not yet heard of any purveyors of "memoirs" within the precincts. But then, and broad-minded as they certainly are, the Benchers (who settle these matters) have to draw the line somewhere. Still, they have admitted a "humorous" author who is commonly reputed to write for *Punch*. Very likely he does. Lots of people do so. Indeed, and if it comes to that, I have written for this organ myself. The popular idea among the public that the contributors are a close corporation is entirely erroneous. As a matter of fact, *Punch* is far more

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“open” to people not on the actual staff than are any of its competitors. Another point worth noting is that at least half-a-dozen women write in its pages regularly.

3.

One of the most depressing experiences I know is to read the average “comic” paper (alleged). This is probably why a supply of these dismal organs is always to hand in the waiting-rooms of dentists, the theory, of course, being that what happens subsequently in the operator’s chair is a pleasant contrast. The theory is well founded. But there is no good reason why such should be the case. There are plenty of men (and several women) who are perfectly capable of writing quite passably humorous matter. The trouble is, there are not enough editors who know this. Such horizon as they possess appears to be bounded by the old stagers. When they have dealt well and truly with, say, Jacobs, Jerome, Lucas, Barry Pain and Pett Ridge—and perhaps just one or two others who have crept past their entanglements—they seem to have exhausted the only list of which they are aware. In case they have not yet heard of them, here are the names of a few more who can be depended upon to put real wit and humour (which, by the way, are not quite the same thing), into a column and thus carry on the torch, Inglis Allen, Ashley Sterne, Thomas Jay, Neil Lyons, Beverley Nichols and M. O. Sale. There are also some (but not very many) women—the best among them being Florence Kil-

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patrick and Ada Levenson—gifted with an agreeably light touch.

But the average editor of a “comic” paper is quite hopeless. Such individuals work in stereotyped grooves. Give them what is technically termed “slapstick stuff” (i.e. something about alcohol, kippers, lodgers and mothers-in-law), and they are perfectly content. Give them anything else, and it comes back to the sender like a homing pigeon. Still, honour where honour is due, and some of them certainly make an effort to secure fresh material. Thus, one of their number solemnly draws up a list of “humorous subjects” every week and sends it out broadcast and to the most unlikely people.

I don’t know why, but I have had sheafs of these first-aid-for-authors schedules from him myself. This is the sort of thing:—

SUGGESTED TOPICS FOR NEXT WEEK’S “WITTY WEEKLY”

1. Coal will soon be £5 per ton.
2. There is said to be a serious slump in cinema attendances. (Suggest, Film Fillips.)
3. Income tax is to be doubled next year.
4. A magistrate has been robbed of his watch. (Our Busy Burglars.)
5. An artist says he likes London fogs.
6. Ten Scotsmen have taken the pledge at Pollockshields. (Work in something about pawn-brokers.)

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Kindly meant, of course. Still, not over whimsical, and it is certainly a bit difficult to pump up anything wildly hilarious in connection with these specimen "topics."

As a matter of fact—and one which the public know, although editors don't—real humour consists in a funny situation, not in funny dialogue. Just as in a farce, so in a book. What one chuckles at is not the *riposte* and badinage of the protagonists, but the situations built up by them. In other words, not in what people say, but in what people do. For example, I cannot think of a comic line in "Pickwick," but I can think of a score of amazingly comic incidents in it.

Being (as you will have observed) an intensely serious writer myself, I have not (yet) gone into the "humour market" to any pronounced degree. Still, as a "school"—or perhaps it is a "college"—is advertising a "Course of Comic Writing, Complete in Six Postal Lessons," I shall have to give the matter my attention. I do not know what they charge. As, however, I hear that a certain singularly dull-witted individual demands (and gets) forty guineas a week for a column of pointless inanity in a Sunday organ, it would be well worth while paying any reasonable fee for expert tuition.

Forty guineas a week! I must think it over.

Candour (my strong suit) compels me to admit that, from time to time, I have made an attempt to effect an entry into this market. So far, however, the results have been a bit discouraging. Still, I did

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get a telephone message the other day from the editor of a would-be humorous paper, asking me to call on him.

"I've seen your bilge about," he said—editors talk like this to such people as myself—"and it will suit us very well. Got a comic idea for me?"

"I've got an idea," I began tentatively.

"That's right," was the affable response. "Always glad to get ideas. What's yours?"

For a moment I half thought I was being offered liquid refreshment. Just in time, however, I remembered that it was an editor who was speaking.

"The idea," I said, "is really in two parts. The first part is that I should do you a comic column every week."

"Yes, that's all right. We shall want an instalment to-morrow. Now, what's the second part?"

"The second part is that you should pay me ten guineas a week for it."

The editor looked at me curiously. A sinister light gleamed in his eye—both eyes. Somehow, the *entente* seemed to have stopped working. There was a moment's pause. Then he got up, walked across the room, and opened the door.

"Thank you," he said coldly. "That is quite the most comic idea I've heard. *Good morning.*"

Like this editorial acquaintance of mine, some of the authors I know—especially the professed humorists among them—also seem to be remarkably touchy. As a case in point, I remember one of their number telling me that useful ideas occurred to him at all sorts

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of unexpected moments. "For instance," he said, "I frequently have a notion for a paragraph while washing my hands." When I thereupon suggested that if he were to take a complete bath, he might reasonably expect to get the embryo for an entire volume, instead of thanking me, the petulant fellow became quite annoyed.

4.

A considerable number of comic, and other, periodicals which flourished like green bay trees twenty years ago and less have long since passed out of existence. I have been to the funeral of many of them. Take, to begin with, some of those in the first category. It is possibly now more than two decades since *Pick-me-Up* last appeared. There ought still to be room for it, as it was easily head and shoulders in front of anything that has since been launched on the same lines. On the other hand, the decease of *Judy*, *Fun*, and *Moonshine*, is perfectly natural, as they were too puerile even for the errand-boy class that wallows in to-day's "comics." Newnes once attempted to infuse a little life into the moribund *Fun*. His choice of an editor, however, was singularly lacking in perspicuity, as it fell on a pillar of the White field Tabernacle. Naturally enough, the paper soon expired in great agony. A much more serious loss was *Ally Sloper*, which always had a penny of my pocket-money. With its weekly cartoon of the Micawber-like "Illustrious One," and the descriptive

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letter-press of his ever entertaining family, it was well worth this modest outlay.

I am rather under the impression that Heinrich Reichardt, who ran *St. Paul's* (now no more), also had something to do with *Pick-me-Up*. Of course, he was a German, as this was before the time when Teutons living in England found it more healthy to camouflage themselves as "Belgians" or "Swiss." Reichardt certainly knew something about pictorial journalism, and was brim full of ideas. Unfortunately, his ideas were a bit in advance of their time, and the fabric of *St. Paul's* eventually fell with a considerable crash.

Among other well-known weeklies of the "popular" sort which have ceased to appear on the bookstalls may be mentioned *Cassells' Saturday Journal*, *Golden Penny* (run by the *Graphic* proprietary), *Household Words*, and *Jerome's To-Day*. This last struck a new note, in that it cost twice as much as any of its rivals. However, it was worth three times as much, for, despite his crankiness, Jerome had a distinct flair for good stuff, and aimed moreover at a public a cut above that of *Tit Bits* and *Answers*. There was also, about this period, a curious production called *Scraps*, and a similar one in *Young Folks*, in the columns of which it is a matter of literary history that *Treasure Island* was serialized. I don't know what Stevenson was paid, but I do know that even such a since distinguished novelist as A. S. M. Hutchinson (who is now a "best-seller") was glad to get 5s. a week out of the cashier. James Henderson, who owned these re-

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markable organs, had modest ideas on the subject of remuneration, and, judging from my own experience, about 7s. 6d. was his top price for an article or short story. Still, he partly atoned for this frugality by running a free luncheon table at the office in Red Lion Court, which any of the contributors were welcome to join on Fridays. I fancy that I got more out of him in mutton chops than in cash. But one cannot have things both ways.

Of the more serious weeklies there has been an equally heavy toll. Thus, *Black and White*, which started with a tremendous fanfare of journalistic trumpets, has long since petered out, as have also *Land and Water*, *Vanity Fair*, and *World*, etc. It is much the same with the solid monthlies. Any way, *Longman's*, *Macmillan's*, *Murray's* and *Temple Ban* have gone, and *Blackwood* and *Cornhill* are practically the sole survivors of their special class. Similarly vanished are such once well-known magazines as the *English Illustrated*, *Good Words*, *Idler*, and *Ludgate*, etc. A real literary man, in H. D. Lowry, did his best with the last, but most of the contributors he gathered round him did their worst.

There is a lot of talk about literature just now (even the *Daily Mirror* has a "literary editor"), but it is curiously significant that the once mighty *Athenaeum* no longer exists as a separate entity, but is swallowed up in the maw of a comparative newcomer like the *Nation*, while the *Academy* and *Speaker*, and half-a-dozen other journals which formerly kept a diligent eye on the writing world, have

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disappeared altogether. I do not think the *Academy* ever really recovered from the loss of Lewis Hind, although Lord Alfred Douglas imparted, during his short régime, what the official communiqués used to call "a certain liveliness" into its stodgy pages. At one period in its chequered career the *Academy* was edited by somebody who caused immense mirth by solemnly ordaining that "Esq., J.P." should be appended to his name on the cover. Still, even this proud distinction did not suffice to keep it going very long.

The dailies seem to have stood the racket of the last twenty years a bit better than have their weekly and monthly contemporaries, and there are few important gaps among them except in the cases of the *Globe*, *Morning Leader*, *Standard*, and *Tribune*. Still, from what one hears of things, the sickle will shortly be busy with several others. All the same, and regrettable as are some of the casualties that have occurred, there is one good sign for the future. This is that dirt, as such, has practically had its day, and there is no longer any remunerative demand among the reading public for the veiled obscenities of the *Pageant*, *Savoy* and *Yellow Book*, etc.

CHAPTER XV

LIFE AND LETTERS

“Celebrities at Home”—Notabilities and Nonentities—Novel use for King’s Messengers—Soldier Dramatist—Club Bores—A Mor-
dant Wit—Experts and their Fees—Paying for Publicity—
Journalistic Arcana—Culture to Order.

1.

I HAVE always regarded “interviewing” as a singularly inept and vulgar form of journalistic employment, and as unfit for anybody who does not happen to be a Peeping Tom by nature. Still, journalists cannot be choosers, and I have had to do a bit of such work myself. Apart, however, from the feeling that I was obtruding unwarrantably upon complete strangers, I did not find it so objectionable as I had fancied. There were two good reasons for this, though. One was that I happened to be connected with a paper that assured me a welcome, and the other was that it brought me into contact with some quite interesting people.

My “interviews,” however, were not of the stereotyped description that generally marks such features (i.e. strings of commonplace answers to impudent questions upon entirely unimportant matters), but were, rather, descriptive articles dealing with per-

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sonalities and their surroundings. As such, they appeared in the *World* among the then familiar "Celebrities At Home" series. The time, too, was one when this journal (then edited by Francis Drummond) was a paper of repute, and had not fallen on the evil days that followed under a later régime. These evil days, however, were thoroughly deserved, for the people who acquired this once fine property ran it merely as an organ for puffing tradesmen and restaurateurs. I have seen a lot of this sort of thing, and sooner or later—generally sooner—it has always brought the paper indulging in such tactics to grief. Too many editors, however, are silly enough to imagine that their readers will lap up any dope of this kind that is ladled out to them.

Unlike most editors of "society" journals, Francis Drummond happened to be a man of birth and breeding. His mother was Lady Clementina Drummond. He had a fixed idea that he himself ought to be Earl of Perth, and he was undoubtedly heir to the earldom of Melfort. Before going to the *World*, he had spent some time as assistant editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette* under Frederick Greenwood.

After the Drummond régime, the *World* had quite a succession of editors, none of whom, however, seemed to remain in control very long. One was Cosmo Hamilton; another was Keble Howard; and a third was an individual who had had an unfortunate difference of opinion with the stewards of the Jockey Club. Although it was subsequently adjusted, it struck me as an inauspicious qualification for conduct-

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ing an organ not expressly intended for an office-boy public. The last people who attempted to galvanize the poor old *World* into life were the energetic owners of *John Bull*. But—and possibly because Horatio Bottomley himself was not employed to bellow in it—*rigor mortis* had already set in, and a few months later it passed silently away.

The Cosmo Hamilton mentioned a moment ago was (and presumably still is) a brother of Philip Gibbs. When I first knew him he was running a curious little paper named the *Sovereign*. We both then belonged to one of the many coteries existing for the special purpose of administering first aid to the Drama. I think it was called the Playboomers' Club, or something of the sort. One afternoon, happening to be there, I saw this remarkable proposal in the "suggestion book":—

"We, the undersigned, consider that the cause of bonhomie would be greatly increased if each member, when outside the club premises, made a point of wearing a small badge in the buttonhole, or perhaps a tie of club colours. The committee invite further suggestions on this subject."

Cosmo Hamilton took thought, and picked up a pen. Then, under the last illustrious name he wrote:—

"I suggest, as an alternative to the above, that this desirable object would be still better secured if members wore straws in their hair."

When I had added my signature to this proposal I sent in my resignation, feeling that such a course

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would save the hard-working committee the trouble of demanding it.

Somewhere about this period in his career, Cosmo Hamilton, who was always striking out in fresh directions, blossomed into the authorship of musical comedies for Seymour Hicks, and in one of these he joined forces with Charles Brookfield. He then, and after experimenting as a more serious dramatist, took up novel writing. The last I heard of him was that he had gone to America, where he seems to have established himself as an accepted authority on English "society" by dint of merely investing ninety per cent of his characters with titles. Truly, where his (or her) literary tastes are concerned, the average American theatre-goer and novel reader is a simple soul.

2.

I think the most interesting of all the various people whom I "wrote up" in the *World* was Lady Randolph Churchill. She was an extraordinarily clever woman (Winston Churchill's mother could scarcely have been anything else), and had a tremendous personality. In a similar capacity I also came across Frederick Curzon, a son of Lord Howe. He was considered by my editor to be a "Celebrity" on two grounds. The first was his position as the husband of Miss Ellis Jeffreys (quite the best comedienne of the present day, and who, it is not generally known, was at one time a Savoyard), and the second claim to distinction was that he happened to be a King's Messenger.

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As I was returning to the office that afternoon with my notes, I walked down Bond Street. In the window of a poulterer's shop there, and in front of which stood an admiring crowd, was a stack of baskets filled with plovers' eggs embedded in layers of moss. Snatching at the opportunity of advertisement, the enterprising tradesman had labelled these in large letters:—"Plovers' eggs for H.M. the King. To be despatched to Biarritz per King's Messenger."

I had often wondered what the precise duties of such a person might be, and what he did for his salary, which I (as a tax-payer) incidentally helped to provide. Now I knew. It struck me, however, as a little odd that people holding positions of importance like this should be employed as glorified flunkies by West End tradesmen.

Another of my subjects—I have no mock modesty, so I shall not call him a "victim"—was Robert Marshall. The present generation has probably not heard of him, but twenty years ago his "Second-in-Command" was filling the Haymarket Theatre, and this had followed previous great successes in "His Excellency the Governor" and "A Royal Family."

Robert Marshall's career was certainly unique. The son of an Edinburgh magistrate, he was an alumnus of St. Andrew's, and had also spent two years at Edinburgh University. Being of an adventurous disposition, he joined the Army as a private—this was long before it became fashionable to do so—and obtained a commission from the ranks, eventually retiring as a captain. While an A.D.C. to the Gover-

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nor of Natal, he wrote his first play. Dion Boucicault, to whom it was submitted, did not know the author from Adam. However, he knew a good play when he saw it, and produced this one at the Court. It had a long and prosperous run there, and was afterwards revived at the Criterion.

The most genial soul that ever lived, Robert Marshall was not in the least spoiled by his well merited success. He had hosts of friends everywhere, and although my acquaintance with him started purely in a business interview, he declined to let it drop, and I was frequently in his Hay Hill flat. He also belonged to the Garrick, which at that period had a membership of a very different class from its present one. I went there with him on several occasions, and must candidly admit that it struck me as being a pretty dull place, and full of ancients who glared suspiciously at anyone not in possession of a long and flowing beard. A tiresome and garrulous old gentleman, who never stopped talking, was pointed out to me as "the wit" of the club. I imagine he was not in form when I happened to be there, since I cannot say that I ever heard anything but the dullest platitudes falling from his lips.

3.

A really witty member of the Garrick, however, was Charles Brookfield. Unfortunately, his brand of wit was of a mordant and biting nature that rather militated against his popularity with the other mem-

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bers. His verbal tilts at the expense of George Grossmith and Oscar Wilde are too well known to bear repetition, even in such an admitted receptacle of all the old stories one has ever heard as a volume of "memoirs" like this. Still, I will take the risk of giving a couple of characteristic examples of his badinage.

The first of these concerns Charles Wyndham. The actor-knight was then playing in his evergreen version of "David Garrick," and when in the club was very fond of sitting immediately underneath a portrait of the "Great Little David" that hung in the smoking-room. One afternoon Brookfield entered the room, and seeing him in his customary chair, stared hard at the canvas above his head.

"Upon my word," he murmured, "it's really extraordinary. I think you grow more like Garrick every afternoon."

"Do you, my dear fellow," returned Wyndham, in his rumbling voice, and as pleased as Punch at the unusual compliment. "Very good of you to say so, I'm sure. So you really think I grow more like Garrick every afternoon?"

"Yes," was the reply, "and less like him every evening."

It was Brookfield, too, who got one over on a certain artist member of the club. This individual had an immense idea of his own ability. He was, however, a pretty bad artist, and as such was continually suffering pangs of rejection at the hands of the Burlington

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House authorities, to whom he persistently submitted his work.

One evening Brookfield happened to be in the smoking-room with a party of somewhat lively friends from the theatre where he was then playing. The artist member, thinking out an idea for a fresh subject for his brush, began to get annoyed. At last he turned to the conversational group.

"I wish you actors wouldn't make such a noise," he said peevishly. "You forget one can see you any time by simply paying a shilling at the theatre."

"Certainly you can, old chap," was Brookfield's prompt retort. "The trouble is, though, it isn't any good our paying a shilling at the Academy to see you there."

4.

By the way, and with reference to interviews in "popular" journals, a little professional secret. It may possibly come as news to the outside public to learn that the printed opinions uttered by bigwigs and supposititiously important people (chiefly in the Sunday papers) on matters of the moment are not always gratuitous "copy." Far from it. Often, indeed, very far. As a matter of fact, I know one advertising admiral (retired) who boldly demands (and gets) a fee of £40 before he will open his mouth to a pressman. This does much to explain why the penny (pre-war) Sunday papers—in which the lucubrations of these eminent authorities appear—now cost twopence, and consist almost entirely of advertisements.

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Really, there is nothing else for it if their proprietors are to live.

Apropos, I was once commissioned to "approach" a lady and secure her considered views (half a column, with photograph complete) on "Should Servants Be Servile?"

There was no mock modesty about this expert. She said point blank that if the readers of the "Weekly Rag-Bag" (or whatever it was I represented) wanted her stuff it was worth £50. The editor agreed with her. Possibly, the fact that the lady happened to be a princess (dusky, certainly, but still a princess all right) influenced him in his decision. I fancy, and were the truth known, it did. Anyway, if the same ungrammatically expressed opinions and utterly commonplace nonsense had been served up by an ordinary individual like myself he would not have thought them worth fifty pence.

He would have been quite right, too.

But just as the "interviewed" sometimes charge for their recorded opinions, so also are they sometimes charged in turn for having them recorded. In these cases, however, it is because, instead of being somebodies, they are merely nonentities. As a matter of fact—and to the considerable advantage of the proprietors of the journals catering to this sort of vulgarity—there are quite a number of people who leap avidly at the chance of securing such publicity and are, moreover, prepared to pay handsomely for it. At least one monthly organ actually lives—and lives well, too—on this little weakness. Its practice is to

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charge a minimum of two hundred guineas. In return for this substantial cash outlay the suppositiously illustrious subject of the "interview" gets a full-page coloured daub (alleged portrait) and a couple of columns of perjured letterpress describing how great and good and gifted he is above his fellows.

It seems remarkable that men should be so vain, and think it worth their while to secure publicity on these terms. Men, however, are quite as vain as women, and there are always plenty of them ready to jump at the chance. I imagine, however, that the star case of this nature was one that cropped up a few months ago, when a wealthy tradesman was sued for no less than £6,000 on account of a glorified puff of himself masquerading as an "illustrated interview."

This was certainly a good deal above the average, even although the accompanying letterpress ran to a large number of pages and was full of photographs of the worthy fellow and his family. The reason of the specially high cost was that the astute proprietor of the paper, while bargaining to do the work for a mere £100, had not mentioned that he was printing sixty copies and was charging separately for each at this rate. In the end the matter was compromised, and the individual concerned paid down a thousand guineas and withdrew all imputations. Considering that the article described him as a "profound scholar," and further declared that his ancestors had fought at the Battle of Hastings (or it might have been Marathon), I think he had very fair value for his expenditure. Besides, he could perfectly well afford it.

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But I would like to know how on earth the editor made this discovery about the Battle of Hastings.

Some more light on dark places, and another little professional secret. Readers of newspaper interviews with people of—well, to put it mildly—not quite the first mentality are often struck by the really remarkable amount of “culture” that is displayed in them. Thus, the other day I saw one with a book-maker (“turf commissioner” in Fleet Street parlance), simply bristling with Latin and Greek and well-selected extracts from all the latest poets; and when talking to pressmen, theatrical managers and authors of musical comedy “books” draw happy parallels from Terence and Racine in the most off-hand fashion imaginable. Well, in nine cases out of ten the classical allusions and choice poetical quotations are really the result of careful sub-editing, the original dross being cleverly transmuted by experts in the office. Bartlett and Lemprière, plus the learned Dr. Smith and Larousse, are always well thumbed in any newspaper library. A good thing, too. Recourse to their alchemy gives “tone” to the otherwise flatulent opinions of Mr. Gasbags, M.P., on “Bimetallism in the Balkans,” or to those of Miss Footlights on “Problems of the Modern Stage,” etc. Also, readers like it, since it argues that they are bung full of culture themselves. Thus no harm is done, and a lot of people are pleased.

Of course, every now and again some petulant fellow, who has been made to say something more than usually foolish in one of these alleged interviews, pro-

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tests that he has not said what is attributed to him. This is unfortunate. Still, the editor who knows his business can generally deal with such unreasonable individuals effectually enough.

5.

I don't pretend to have known Swinburne (another difference between myself and the average autobiographer!), but I did know Theodore Watts-Dunton. As a matter of fact, it was more or less impossible for any young man hanging on to the fringes of literature and journalism in his day to avoid making the acquaintance of the faithful watch-dog of "The Pines," Putney Hill, S.W.10. All one had to do was to write the veriest trifle about Swinburne, and (even when buried in the obscurest corner of the humblest provincial paper) the lynx eye of Watts-Dunton would be certain to see it, and a cordial invitation to call upon him would inevitably follow. At any rate, this is what happened to me and it also happened to stacks of others.

After the first one, which broke the ice, I made many subsequent pilgrimages to the Putney Hermitage, where Swinburne and Watts-Dunton had, many years earlier, set up housekeeping together under circumstances that at the time considerably fluttered literary London. I always found Watts-Dunton a most charming, cultivated, and hospitable old gentleman. It is true that to my more hustling standards he lived very much in the past, but from the fashion

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in which he discussed it, it must have been an amazingly interesting past. There are many moments, indeed, when I wish I had lived in it myself.

Far too much small-talk about Watts-Dunton has already been served up by assiduous and esurient chroniclers to furnish me with any excuse (if I happened to want one) for adding more than a fraction thereto. I said a moment ago, however, that he "lived in the past." What I mean is that, although he kept surprisingly well abreast of current matters, his talk was principally of the great figures of his Chelsea days, and sometimes when I chanced to mention a modern he had to search his memory to "place" him.

Thus, one afternoon when I said something about Hall Caine he looked a little puzzled.

"Hall Caine?" he repeated. "Let me think. Oh, I know, you mean *Tom* Caine. Yes, of course. We were a lot together once. Haven't seen him for years. Tell me all about him."

Until that moment it had never occurred to me that the first name of Briton's "best-seller" was Thomas.

That evening I happened to see Hall Caine, and mentioned that I had been talking to Theodore Watts-Dunton a few hours earlier. Thereupon he, in his turn, also looked a little puzzled.

"Theodore Watts-Dunton?" he murmured, and as if grouping in the dark places of memory. "Who's that? Oh, you mean my dear old friend, Walter Watts!"

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Of course, I ought to have been aware of it, but I had quite forgotten that it was as Walter Watts that Theodore Watts-Dunton started life.

I have known Hall Caine (slightly) for years, and have always found him extremely helpful to writers struggling to secure a foothold up the slippery slopes of the path that he himself has trodden so successfully, and genuinely interested in the work of young authors. Lots of "superior" people, I know, affect to laugh at him and his books, but behind this attitude is often one of a green envy.

CHAPTER XVI

PIERIAN SPRINGS

A Nest of Singing Birds—Poets and Banquets—An Eskimo Bard—
“Money in Poetry”—Anthology Compiling—Writers and the War
—“Continued in Our Next”—A Literary Stronghold—Where
Wells Went—Etiquette for Everybody.

1.

I REFERRED just now (Chapter XII, page 158) to the Poets' Club. This nest of singing birds owes its existence mainly to the indefatigable efforts of Henry Simpson, who combines (as Samuel Rogers did before him) the practice of banking with that of writing quite acceptable verse. Of course, every member of the club is not a poet of perhaps the first water—this would be too much to expect—but the list nevertheless includes Hilaire Belloc, Laurence Binyon, Lord Dunsany, Gilbert Frankau, Maurice Hewlett, Compton Mackenzie, Walter de la Mare, and Henry Newbolt, all of whom certainly count for something, and some of them for a good deal.

The monthly dinners of the club are agreeable functions, and one can always be sure of meeting, mixed up with the also-rans, a number of interesting people at them. To be quite candid, as is my way,

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the majority of these are apt to be furnished by the guests, who are not necessarily limited to poets. This, perhaps, is just as well, as otherwise I should not have seen Henry Ainley and Bernard Shaw gathered round the festive board.

Of course, a meal at which professed poets are in the majority is not like an assemblage of, say, astronomers or politicians, or reporters or licensed victualers. It has a distinctive note. That of the Poets' Club banquets seems to be a certain happy freedom from accepted convention. As a result, the proceedings are often marked by quaint—not to say, bizarre—touches that give them an individuality of their own. Thus, at one of the more recent monthly gatherings a generously inclined member brought three ladies, but no money. When the *maitre d'hotel* of the Soho restaurant we were patronising demanded a cheque, his offer to write him a sonnet instead was coarsely and indignantly refused. The manager—a grossly material fellow—to whom he appealed was no better, and actually seemed to think that because a man had his head full of poetry he must necessarily have his pocket full of money.

On another occasion (and one, fortunately, when the Press, who sometimes had the bad taste to accept our hospitality and then make fun of us in would-be comic paragraphs, were absent) a poet who had come all the way from Iceland created something of a scene. Dissatisfied apparently with the menu—perhaps he missed his native blubber—he dined chiefly off raw brandy and new champagne. The result of the mix-

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ture was that after making a succession of alarming sounds in a language that nobody could understand, he grew so obstreperous that he had to be forcibly removed by the more stalwart members present.

Still, these little episodes really give a zest to things, and prevent the Poets' Club dinners degenerating into the stodgy affairs that mark the banquets of actors and authors and ordinary people. Any way, I am all for encouraging them.

Envious people outside the charmed circle of membership have the ill manners to laugh at the Poets' Club, and affect to see in it no serious attempt to cultivate the Muse. They are wrong, for an integral item of each monthly meeting is the declaiming by members of their own works. A certain amount of publicity is thus assured them. I once even heard a specially gifted member deliver an entire address on Antiphonal Dirges in heroic couplets. It was a veritable *tour de force*, and all went well until he deliberately rhymed "Savonarola" with "spats and bowler". This was felt to be overstepping ordinary decorum. I understand that the committee took very strong action.

There is a theory that there is "no money in poetry." It is an unfounded one. As a matter of fact, there is quite a lot of money in poetry (or what passes for it), and there seems to be most money in bad poetry. Any way, Tennyson is still popular as a school prize—I have a complete set myself, gained for "good conduct and literary composition"—and the mellifluous heart-throbs of Miss (or possibly Mrs.) Ella Wheeler

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Wilcox appeal to an enormous following. I fancy, too, that bards of another description—Rupert Brooke, Henry Newbolt, and Alfred Noyes, etc.—have not caused their publishers many sleepless nights. Of course, I don't imagine that the name of Gilbert Frankau will go ringing down the ages (any way, not very loudly) as a poet. All the same, the combined sales of his five volumes of verse are advertised as having reached the respectable total of 18,000 copies. It is now one more, as I bought a copy yesterday on a stall in the Caledonian Market. By the way, this is the place for book bargains. I was quite thrilled the other afternoon to see something of my own there, labelled "sixpence, but worth ninepence."

2.

Being nothing of a poet myself, and knowing precious little about the subject, I once, when the chance offered, quite cheerfully accepted a commission to compile an anthology. It was a poor anthology, but the putting of it together was a very interesting experience, for the work brought me into intimate contact with a number of professional poets. These were of all sorts—good, bad, and indifferent—the indifferent among them perhaps predominating. But there was reason for this, as there is for most things. The fact is, the firm financing the venture did not believe in paying poets; and the poets whom I first approached for permission to include specimens of their talent did not believe in working

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without being paid. It was a bit of an *impasse*, and neither side would yield. My sympathies were certainly with the bards, whom I considered ought to be handsomely remunerated. As, however, I could not get my principals to share this view, I had to fall back on a second line for the majority of my contributors. There were some truly wonderful fellows among these. Indeed—and until they themselves told me so—I did not even know that half of them were poets at all. However, they seemed very positive about it, and, after all, it was not for me to contradict them.

Touching this delicate matter of fees, I found—and as a general rule—that the better the poet the smaller the financial value he put on his work. The really grasping people were the quite minor bardlets, some of whom—judging from their demands—must have thought they were dealing with Rothschild. Thus, one such individual to whom I wrote (but only because I was definitely instructed to do so) forwarded a few amateurish couplets which would have been turned down at sight by any cracker merchant who knew his business, and unblushingly demanded fifty guineas for them. When I said no—or words to that effect—he became so unpoetical as to send me a solicitor's letter.

This began:—"In re 'Pink Pastorals' (poem), our client," etc., and proceeded to hint in no uncertain language at reprisals. I offered (but without result) a poem of my own in exchange. It was longer, as well as being quite a good one. Any way, a cigarette firm had paid me two guineas for it. One of these

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days I must turn the cigarettes into soap, and try it on Lord Leverhulme.

Speaking generally, and as I said just now, my experience was the more inferior the poet the greater the value he put on his effusion, and *vice versa*. Thus W. H. Davies sent me three charming lyrics, and modestly inquired if I thought 7s. 6d. each "too much." Stephen Phillips, who seemed to have a bargain line in sonnets, offered me one for half a guinea, "or three for thirty shillings." When my publisher discovered that this would save him as much as eighteen pence he instructed me to close with the latter offer. Austin Dobson and Edmund Gosse were generous enough to make no charge at all, and Norman Gale and several others merely stipulated for a free copy of the volume when it appeared. It was the same with the women poets, and really accomplished writers, such as Nora Chesson, Dora Sigerson, Katherine Tynan, and Rosamond Marriott Watson were equally modest.

My own view—but I could not persuade my publisher to accept it for a moment—was that every contributor should receive an honorarium of at least five guineas. I have supplied quite enough free material myself to various symposia and books of elegant extracts to know how thoroughly objectionable it is to be pestered in this fashion. The system, indeed (and which is a conspicuous feature of "charitable" annuals) is utterly indefensible. Any way, in this foolish little anthology with which I was connected I made it my business to see that everybody who wanted

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it got something—if only as many copies of the volume as he (or she) chose to accept. When the publisher discovered this I don't think he ever really recovered from the shock.

Like, I suppose, most people with an address contained in the usual reference books, I have often received entirely unsolicited offerings in prose and verse from complete strangers, accompanied by a request to purchase them (at the author's valuation) or to return them at my own expense. Bernard Shaw, for example, tells how he first got into touch with W. H. Davies in this fashion. As a rule I was always punctilious in returning such bantlings, for I felt that the author set store by them if I did not. Once, however, I refrained. I forget my reason, but I probably had liver, or no stamps. Plus the bad manners, it was an error of judgment which I have regretted ever since.

What happened on this occasion was that one morning the postman brought me a slim little paper-covered volume of verse. A civilly expressed letter accompanying it asked me to forward the sender half a crown, or else to return him the poems. I did neither. I had not ordered the poems, and I did not want them. From a casual glance they did not even strike me as being good poems. Accordingly, I put them aside and forgot all about the matter.

Not so my uninvited correspondent. A week later he wrote again. This time his tone was not quite so polished. In fact, he seemed to hint that I had acquired a valuable piece of literary property by a

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dubious method, and was retaining it for my own nefarious ends. In fact—and to make a long story still longer—he wanted to know why the devil I wasn't honest enough to pay him for his poems since I kept them. As, however, by this time they were in the waste paper basket—or at any rate had vanished beyond my ken—I really could not return them. Also, and as I had not asked for them, I had no intention of paying for them.

The next letter I got was no more soothingly worded. Accordingly, and now thoroughly stirred to action, I sent it back together with a forcible expression of opinion. I have, and as I have said just now—regretted the fact ever since, for that slim and unpretentious little volume is now worth many pounds in the eyes of collectors of first editions. Its title was “A Navy's Poems,” and the author was Patrick Macgill.

All the same, Patrick Macgill (I have since had the pleasure of meeting and explaining matters to him) writes better novels than poetry. His “Children of the Dead End” will take a lot of beating.

3.

Although they can write effective enough verse when they please, I don't suppose that either Gilbert Frankau or Compton Mackenzie would rate themselves as poets, and I am quite sure that nobody else (who knew anything about it) would do so. Still, I have seen Frankau take himself very seriously when

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presiding over a meeting of the Poets' Club; and I once spent a hectic evening with Compton Mackenzie at a curious gathering in the hinterland of South Kensington, where long-haired young men and short-haired young women discoursed very learnedly on dactyls and strophes. All extremely highbrow and improving, but just a bit beyond me. Where, however, Mackenzie was concerned, the result was his "Kensington Rhymes," so his evening, at any rate, was not wasted.

Unlike an unpleasantly large number of able-bodied writers who (although of military age at the time) dug themselves securely into various civilian "jobs" at home, both Mackenzie and Frankau went off to the war, where—and to use that horrid cliché—they "did their bit." I could, however, name a dozen slack young *embusqués* among their contemporaries who promptly slipped into ministries (that of "propaganda" was the favourite funk hole) and stopped there until the Armistice had been signed. They then became the most pronounced fire-eaters imaginable. On the other hand, I could also name authors who, while old enough to be their fathers, joined up at the very beginning. Take, for example, Fitzroy Gardner. At the respectable age of sixty, he scrapped twenty-five birthdays, sought out a recruiting sergeant, and enlisted as a private. Percy White, too, who can see seventy peeping round the corner, served in Italy, and Albert Kinross and W. B. Maxwell, whom I came across in the mud and blood of Flanders, were considerably older than many of their

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brother novelists who "served" on the Whitehall "front."

Compton Mackenzie went to the Dardanelles as a temporary subaltern (Red Marines) and came back a captain, covered with decorations. His assortment includes such prismatic effects as the Legion of Honour, Order of the Redeemer, and Grand Cross of the White Eagle, etc. I don't know if he also received the Freedom of Athens, but he certainly ought to have had it for functioning there as Military Control Officer. Gilbert Frankau was a Gunner; Stephen Graham, a Guardsman; and W. B. Maxwell, a Fusilier. Then Albert Kinross joined the Army Service Corps, Percy White, the Air Force, and Patrick Macgill, the London Irish. Fiction writers as a class, however, rather gravitated towards the Labour Corps (I happened upon a well-known novelist commanding a company of these warriors near Maubeuge), and poets seemed to have a preference for the mounted arm.

The literary career of Compton Mackenzie offers curious material for speculation. After a false start in the bastard-romanticism of "The Passionate Elopement," he wrote, in "Carnival," a novel about people like human beings, and promptly followed it with a succession of others about people like nothing on earth. But this sort of thing seems too often the way with the ultra-moderns. Among the names of such that "jump to the eye" are those of Gilbert Frankau, W. L. George, Stephen McKenna, W. B. Maxwell, Temple Thurston, and Hugh Walpole. Each of the

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sextet was well and truly delivered of an early book with at any rate blood and bones in it. But of their subsequent output—well, the less said the better. Of course, I know that “Sonia” and “Vivien” were merely glorified *Family Herald* “raised to the nth,” as mathematicians would put it, but all the same, they contained passably good stuff.

4.

Of late years a curious fashion has developed among certain of the younger novelists of writing trilogies, if not tetralogies. Either the effort of inventing a fresh set of characters exhausts their energies to such a degree that they deliberately put the same set into their next two (and sometimes three and four) books; or else they labour under the (generally quite unfounded) impression that the public are so absorbed in these protagonists that another dose of them is required. I fancy Arnold Bennett and Galsworthy started the fashion, but they have been very assiduously followed by others of less than half their accomplishment. Stephen McKenna, for example, has the bacillus very badly. It is a cloying diet, even for the most perfervid of library subscribers.

Certain of these trilogist and tetralogist merchants are very fond of inserting on the final page of their immortal works a portentous announcement to some such effect as the following:—

“In the early spring of next year Mr. Gasbags contemplates publishing a sequel, carrying on the narrative of the second marriage of William (to a widow

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at Cheltenham), and the departure for Australia of his cousin Mary. This will be succeeded, some time during the ensuing winter, by the publication of a third novel, dealing with the unsuccessful action for divorce instituted by Colonel Smithers, and the decease (from double pneumonia) of his step-brother Henry."

Upon my word, I might just as well wind up these chapters by printing just above the colophon (which seems to be the accepted place for such thrilling announcements) the following intimation to the public conceiving a projected volume of my own:—

"The author of 'Notes About Nobodies' intends issuing towards midsummer of the year after next (or earlier, or later, or not at all) a companion volume, provisionally entitled 'Something About Somebodies.' "

I must think it over.

A friend tells me that the opinion of experts at the Authors' Club is that Arnold Bennett is responsible for introducing this "follow-up" system. He adopted it in "Clayhanger," I know, but he was not the first to do so.

"A greater than I invented the dodge," he once said to me when we were discussing the subject.

"Who was that?" I inquired.

"Balzac."

5.

A curious fellow, Arnold Bennett. Despite all the long years he has lived in London he has never

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really lost his Staffordshire accent, and still contrives to look like a provincial who has come from the Midlands by excursion to see a Cup Tie. Early habits are strong, and it is said of him that whenever he goes into a restaurant he instinctively turns his plate upside down to identify the manufacturer's trade-mark.

I am told that the first time he did this at the Reform an interested fellow member inquired if he were a conjurer. But the tale is probably entirely apocryphal, and the solemn atmosphere of the coffee-room was never disturbed in this fashion.

The Reform, by the way, has of late years become quite a literary stronghold; and I have seen William Archer, Anthony Hope, Henry Arthur Jones, Henry Lucy, Stephen McKenna, and H. G. Wells all assembled there at the same time. Concerning the last named, the one anecdote about him that has not been serialized so often as the others is, I fancy, the following:—

Wells, as everybody knows, is the son of a professional cricketer, and started life in a draper's shop. Being the least snobbish of men, he is properly proud of the fact, and is always ready to chat over old times with his ex-comrades of the ribands and laces department when he comes across them. It happened that one of these individuals, who had not kept very close track of his subsequent career, met him the other afternoon coming out of his club. "They tell me you've got on fine, Mr. Wells, since you left us," he remarked. "Thank you, I'm not doing so badly,"

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was the modest reply. "Yes," said his former fellow-apprentice, "they tell me you're at Harrods now!"

6.

I suppose they can't help themselves—as I can scarcely imagine they would do it deliberately—but half the modern novelists nowadays seem to write like footmen. Thus, when one of their characters speaks to a woman (always, by the way, carefully referred to as a "lady"), they think nothing of making him address her as "Miss Mary," or whatever her name is. Another and still more comic effect, occurring in what is boldly announced as a "society" novel, is this fine flower:—"Permit me," said the colonel, "to introduce my friend, the Hon. John de Montgomery."

There is really no occasion for this sort of thing. Quite reliable handbooks on etiquette can always be picked up (second hand) in the Charing Cross Road for a shilling.

CHAPTER XVII

CAMEOS

Carmelite House Hegemony—Square Pegs on the Press—Proprietorial Bulletin—Qualifications for Directorship—Fleetway House Microcosm—A Super-policeman—Scotland Yard Sleuths.

1.

LIKE most people who ply a more or less ready pen, I, too, was once snatched up in the maw of the *Daily Mail* to fill a temporary gap. My career, however, with that exigent organ, was not particularly long, nor was it particularly glorious while it lasted. In fact, so much so, that I quite welcomed an early opportunity that arose of transferring myself elsewhere.

I never really discovered why I should have gone to the *Daily Mail* at all. Certainly, it was not my deliberate choice. A sober quarterly (if not an annual) would have suited me much better, or, failing this, a leisurely monthly, or even a weekly. But, then, I doubt if anyone on the staff really knew just why he was invited to join the Northcliffe Press in the first instance, or just why he was hoofed off it afterwards. These matters were always hidden mysteries, and the Carmelite House hegemony guarded them like Sibylline secrets. It was no sort of good

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asking, either, as the information was never under any circumstances disclosed.

As it is now some little time since I occupied a humble footing among them, I have only a rather vague recollection of the people perched on the various branches of the Carmelite House tree. But I do distinctly remember that the office was scarcely the cosmic organization its founder probably imagines it to be. Still, Thomas Marlowe, the editor, always exhibited a refreshing geniality and courtesy towards the least important members of the staff, and in a quarter where these pleasant qualities were anything but marked.

To be absolutely candid, the general atmosphere of the establishment, when I knew it, was not a particularly happy one. People went about with sad, unsmiling faces, and obviously in mortal terror of losing their jobs and being cast out summarily into a cold world. They had some reason for this, too, since the guillotine fell frequently and with precious little warning, and when a man got sacked he found other papers anything but tumbling over each other to employ him merely because he had been on the *Mail*. Apart from this consideration, the general body of sub-editors and reporters were—with very few exceptions—of nothing more than the most ordinary ability. If one of them got “the bag,” a hundred could be secured to take his place, and without the slightest difficulty. It meant nothing more than telephoning to the Institute of Journalists or some similar body, which can always produce any

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number of equally competent men at a moment's notice. Of course, this was not the opinion the staff themselves held. When even a junior reporter or assistant proof-reader left, he always expressed immense astonishment that the paper contrived to come out at all the next morning and much the same as usual.

2.

As was probably inevitable, there were some very square pegs in the round holes of the *Mail's* reporting staff when I knew something of it. How they got there at all was a mystery, and how they contrived to stop there was a still greater one. But they did not, as a rule, stop there very long, for the guillotine was always falling at Carmelite House. It was a case of "here to-day and gone to-morrow," and often before a face got familiar it had disappeared.

One, Kennedy Jones, a pronouncedly truculent individual—"vigorous personality," was the way his admirers put it—was executioner-in-chief. He was chiefly concerned with the *Mail's* little brother, the *Evening News*, and when he happened to be on the war-path (generally after a board meeting), his progress through the office was like that of a reaping machine through a field of ripe corn. Still, he had his points. At any rate, he was no slavish respecter of incompetent individuals just because they had been at Carmelite House a long time, and many of those who fancied they were securely dug in there found themselves sadly mistaken.

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But if some people got pushed down, others got pushed up. A stamp-licking subordinate of one day would be (and as much to his surprise as that of everybody else) elevated to a responsible position the next. Pure luck, and, as often as not, nothing more than ability to see a chance and jump at it. As used to be said, "one never knew from day to day if one would be running the lift or running the paper."

The stock story on this subject is told of Charles Hands, then a reporter and now a director. Coming up in the lift one day with the proprietor himself, he took off his hat and bowed politely to the diminutive lad in buttons who clanged the gates after them.

"I wish you wouldn't do that sort of thing," said Northcliffe, when they were out of earshot. "It only makes you look foolish."

"Well," said the imperturbable Hands, who was generally regarded as a licensed buffoon, "it struck me as rather a sound plan. You see, one never knows when that boy won't be running the paper and able to sack me."

Charles Hands was privileged, and could say this sort of thing. With anybody else, however, it would have been almost a case of an inquest.

Talking of square pegs on the reporting staff, I remember a man of really considerable literary ability, and something of a poet as well, being thrust into this curious turmoil. He had come to Carmelite House with the naïve idea that his mission there would be to compose solid leading articles and assist in directing the policy of the paper on matters of impor-

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tance. To his secret grief, however, he found himself—when, in what A. R. Orage calls (in his admirable “Readers and Writers”), the “stuffy and bawling atmosphere of the Daily Mail”—merely employed to write “pars” about actors and to get “news stories” from butlers and footmen. For some time he stuck to it, doing his best. But he did not last. One fine day somebody high up in the hierarchy told him to secure the utterances of a cinema star on some entirely puerile matter.

“It’s very important,” announced this individual pompously, “so mind and bring back a full report.”

“That’s all right,” said the other, but without appearing much impressed.

“Well, I hope so. By the way, of course you write shorthand?”

“Sorry, but I don’t.”

“Don’t write shorthand!” exclaimed the big man in horror-struck accents. “Bless my soul, why not?”

“Damm it all,” was the unabashed response, “you might as well ask Hall Caine why he doesn’t write shorthand.”

When he returned to his colleagues in the reporters’ room and mentioned the episode, they heard him with bated breath.

“Don’t you know who that was?” said one of them.

“I neither know nor care.”

“Well, you will soon. He’s a director!”

Despite his brave words, the daring fellow did know, and he did care, and very soon, too, for the incident brought his career to a sudden end. Still, I

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fancy he derived a certain amount of satisfaction from it.

3.

Although he is shrewd enough in many respects, in others Lord Northcliffe has the mind of a child—and often of a very fretful child. For instance, he is always issuing angry bulletins to the staff, complaining that readers tell him they consider the *Daily Mail* to be “undignified” (the usual term is “vulgar rag”), and demanding the reason for this opinion. One would have thought it was as plain as a pikestaff. Unfortunately, however, for his peace of mind, Northcliffe is apparently under the quite remarkable impression that he is rich enough and powerful enough to have things both ways. Thus, he would actually appear to be sufficiently naïve to imagine that the *Mail* can bring out a “Sandringham hat” (and expect people, other than music hall comedians, to wear it), set small children to erect *Daily Mail* sand castles all round the coast, and at the same time find the class for whom he really wishes to cater prepared to put up with these puerile vulgarities and regard the newspaper descending to them as “dignified.” It has never been done yet; and it never can, and never will, be done.

Despite its immense circulation (which, by the way, is by no means synonymous with influence), it has always been a crumpled rose leaf in Lord Northcliffe’s proprietorial bed that the *Daily Mail* is not taken as seriously as, say, the *Times*. Yet, heaven

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alone knows how he could fairly expect anything else when he read the sort of stuff he prints there.

And he does read it, too. No mistake about this. In fact, not only does he read every word that appears in its columns, from title down to colophon, but he also compiles a daily bulletin embodying his considered views on each issue. I have seen many of these broadsheets. They were always couched in extremely vigorous, not to say trenchant, language, and to any one possessing even an elementary sense of humour they were a sheer joy. There were, however, very few of such people in Carmelite House in my time. Accordingly, they were considered most alarming documents; and, when stuck up in the reporters' room by a trembling sub-editor, would be read with bated breath.

Headed, "Message from the Chief," this would be a fair sample of the morning strafe:—

1. "To-day's paper is just about the worst ever published.

2. "Who is the fool responsible for the paragraph dealing with unemployment in Sheffield? Tell him from me to get some idea of his subject.

3. "The 'Society' column seems to be written by a footman and intended for housemaids. As usual, it is full of mistakes about people's titles. The man in charge must really lose the impression that the son of a baronet is necessarily a peer. If he doesn't lose this impression, he will certainly lose his job.

4. "I like the story of the curate who apologized for coming late to church because he hadn't finished

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reading the serial instalment. It is the sort of thing that sends up our circulation. Let us have more of these human stories.

5. "The general articles on Page Six are rather worse than usual. I note that one deals with wine, one with beer, and two with cards. Tell the man looking after this feature that booze and bridge are not the only items that interest our readers.

6. "The second leader is quite appalling. It misses the whole point.

7. "The police news is fairly well done. Still, it ought to be done a lot better.

8. "Our correspondent at Puddleton-on-Marsh is no sort of use. He misses everything. Instruct him either to wake up or shut up.

9. "There is quite a good news story at the head of Column 1, Page 3. Let me know who wrote it, and tell the others I regard it as a model.

10. "The Woman's Page is full of clever touches.

11. "Who is the ignorant fool who refers to 'total failure of macaroni crop'? Does he think the stuff grows?

12. "The photographs on the back page are improving. They are, however, still pretty bad."

But the bitterest criticism was always reserved for the occasions (comparatively rare) when the *Mail* missed a piece of news given by a rival organ (in particular by the *Daily Express*), and especially when it had been "splashed." Furious telegrams and long-distance trunk calls would then pour in, demanding sub-editorial heads on chargers. At such mom-

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ents a positive anguish of depression would settle over the whole building; and when a trembling scout at the window reported that the great man himself had arrived in his car and was coming along to investigate personally, the staff would scuttle away like frightened rabbits to their lairs.

I fancy, however, that Northcliffe's bark was a good deal worse than his bite, and I certainly heard of him doing generous things to members of the staff when they were ill, or to people to whom he took a fancy. About half-a-dozen times during my short career things that I happened to write were favourably commented upon in his celebrated daily bulletin. Once he even went so far as to record it as his considered (but guardedly expressed) opinion that "this fellow seems to know what he's talking about and writes decent English." After this, there was a strong impression among my envious colleagues that I was in the running for a directorship.

A directorship of the *Daily Mail* and its associated group was the coveted guerdon of many years' good service and the successful weathering of innumerable storms in Carmelite House. It was not bestowed as a matter of course. In fact, no one ever discovered the precise system on which it was bestowed. Merit, opportunity, and sheer luck all seemed to run hand in hand. As often as not, too, Lord Northcliffe had his own reasons for conferring this signal mark of favour, this zenith, as it were, of successful endeavour.

Apropos this matter, the star story in Carmelite House is the following:—

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It happened that much to the annoyance of "the Chief"—who simply could not understand that anybody could ever want to leave his employment—the editor of one of his Sunday papers resigned, in order to accept a better job from a rival firm. Thereupon (so the tale goes), Northcliffe bestowed the vacant position on a young man then occupying a very subordinate post on his staff. The next thing he did was to send for this fortunate youth and remark that he had also decided to make him a director.

"Oh thank you very much, my lord," returned the recipient of this unexpected bounty, almost prostrating himself on the floor with gratitude. "Very good, indeed, of your lordship to recognize me like this. I'm sure I don't know what I've done to deserve it."

Northcliffe, however, who hates snobbery among his employees, cut this one's performance very short.

"Don't worry yourself about that," he said grimly. "You haven't done anything. You're not nearly clever enough. I'm not making you a director because you deserve it, but just to show your predecessor, that ungrateful fool Gubbins, what he's missed by leaving me."

4.

There is another Northcliffian microcosm in Faringdon Street (the home of *Answers* and *Comic Cuts*, and half a hundred other deservedly successful organs). This is a somewhat more leisured hive of industry than is Carmelite House, and none of its host of papers and magazines come out oftener

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than once a week, and for some of them the public has to wait a whole month. The driving force at Fleetway House, as this establishment is known, is Sir George Sutton. There are nearly one thousand people working there under him, and he is popular with all of them. This is no mean achievement.

I mentioned *Answers* just now. This is a journal at which many "superior" people affect to laugh, but (and apart from the fact that I have had many a welcome guinea out of it), the organ is one for which I have a great respect. After all, there must be something in a paper which, like this, has turned its proprietor into a prominent Peer of the Realm, built up a colossal fortune for himself and his brothers, and laid the foundations of solid success for a considerable number of other very ordinarily equipped individuals. A "popular" paper cannot do this unless it has points. *Answers* has any number of points. Make no mistake about it. Of course there is a Scotsman at the helm—there always is in really successful journalism—and William Blackwood, who has occupied the editorial chair for the last ten years (coming to London via Dundee), knows his job thoroughly. As a natural consequence, he has received the guerdon of a directorship of the Amalgamated Press.

The chief point about *Answers* is that it caters for its vast public intelligently. There is something for everyone in its all-embracing columns. The contents of an average number rather resemble an average music hall programme, where, if you don't

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like the performing fleas, you are certain to find something else that you do like, such as Shakespeare, or Seymour Hicks, or a conjurer. Thus, in a typical copy, if you skip the article on, say, "Should Curates Kiss" (probably written by myself), you can make certain of discovering an informative and bright column or two on some question of the day and contributed by an admitted expert. Then, there is always a solid slab of a "great" serial to fill up the niches.

5.

But for a solitary occasion (when I happened to sit next him at a theatre), I never saw Lord Northcliffe—except in a photograph. He struck me as being, on the whole, much more like his photograph than is usually the case with such efforts. I once, however, had to see him on a matter of business. Fixing it up was not the simplest thing in the world. Far from it. After much telephoning and *pourparlers* with his barrage of private secretaries and watch-dogs, I eventually managed to run him to earth, and discovered that he had elected to spend a fine summer afternoon at—of all imaginable places—a cinema. Such are the relaxations of the great.

When, however, I reached the appointed rendezvous, my quarry had already gone. Apparently, the antics of the "film favourites" appealed to him as little as they do to myself. Still, I found somebody else there who interested me much more. This was Basil Thomson, the then head of the "Special

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Department" at Scotland Yard. He was making his debut as a scenario-writer himself on this occasion, but, as his effort was for purely propaganda purposes, it did not, when duly "released," seriously rival the popularity of Miss Mary Pickford, and Messrs. Chaplin and Fairbanks, and the other accepted stars of the movie world.

After the show, Basil Thomson took me back to Scotland Yard, where I had a very interesting talk with him, and saw something of the official methods of combating the activities of aliens in high places. Some of these merchants occupied very high places indeed. Among others, I saw the *dossier* of a certain super-profitier of foreign extraction, who would probably have felt far from flattered at the idea—had he known it—of being thus recorded in the police archives of his adopted country.

I don't pretend to have been behind the scenes or to have been admitted within a hundred miles of the inner councils, but I have a strong idea that Basil Thomson's summary—not to say, cavalier—removal from office was due to pressure exerted by certain of these camouflaged "Britons," on whose papers of naturalization the ink was scarcely dry. They had influence and interest, and found Thomson's absolute incorruptibility and unceasing vigilance inimical to their peace of mind. But to whatever it was due, his enforced "resignation" was a dirty bit of business, and a poor return for long years of loyal and valuable service.

General Horwood, who stepped into General

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Macready's shoes when he left Scotland Yard for Ireland, had gone to France on the outbreak of war as a young captain in a Lancer regiment. In the forcing-house of G. H. Q. he speedily blossomed into a brigadier. I remember meeting him when he was functioning as a provost-marshal at St. Omer. This appointment is that of a sort of super-policeman. I was a bit tired of the mud and blood and other horrors attached to the particular job in which I was employed at the moment, and thought that I would like to have a change and share the hardships (regular meals and a soft bed to sleep in, with a sound roof over my head) of the G. H. Q. warriors. Sir William Horwood was remarkably civil (I don't for a moment suppose it had anything to do with it, but General Macready had written to him on my behalf), but nothing came of the interview. The fact was, all coveted billets on the A. P. M. staff (such as the one I sought) were strictly reserved for senior officers who had become *dégommé*. Since I had not distinguished myself by getting "un-stuck," it was impossible to fit me in. This, of course, was not what Horwood said in so many words, but it was certainly the impression he gave me.

CHAPTER XVIII

CLUBS AND CLUBMEN

Curious Clubs—Literary Coteries—Barring Clause for Hecklers—
Cachet and Clubdom—Blackballing—Body-snatching by Com-
mittees—Changes in Clubland—Affable Hall-Porter.

LONDON is full of queer clubs. They are not all run on the decorous lines of the stately and well-known institutions in Pall Mall and St. James's Street, but they none the less have their points. Who, for instance, has ever heard of the Crimes Club? This flourishing coterie does not, as the uninitiated might think, depend on our leading burglars, etc. (as it happens, their address is not sufficiently permanent) for its clientèle, but has a membership largely composed of barristers, editors, publishers and reviewers. Not over much difference, perhaps, between them and these others. Still, there it is. The avowed object, too, of the members is not to commit crimes (other than those inseparable from the practice of their ordinary vocations), but to study them. Thus, they are criminologists, rather than criminals.

Then there is the deservedly popular Buttons Club, with comfortable premises (in a basement) just off Trafalgar Square. This is a really exclusive organization, as membership is severely limited to *bona fide* page-boys and individuals of similar standing

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employed in approved establishments such as the Northumberland Avenue hotels and leading Piccadilly restaurants. I don't know if the junior staff of the Bloomsbury boarding-houses are eligible, but I rather doubt it.

Another club run on very similar lines, but for adults only, and to which I was once taken by a committee-man, has a pleasant set of rooms in the heart of Mayfair. To be precise, it "functions" in a discreet pub behind Curzon Street. In fact, an ideal situation. When originally founded, it was to have been called the St. Jeames's. As, however, it was thought that this might possibly lead to confusion with an existing club in Piccadilly of somewhat similar name (but with very different objects), it is now known as the Yellowplush. This is quite a happy idea, for all the best butlers, footmen, valets and head waiters belong to it.

As is only proper, the Yellowplush takes itself very seriously, and the strictest etiquette and deportment, both inside and outside the premises, have to be observed. I am told, indeed, that one member of considerable standing (deputy-assistant groom-of-the-chambers, or something of the sort, in a ducal household), was recently expelled on the grounds that he had been seen by another member carrying a parcel in public. The committee of investigation, after going very carefully into the matter, ruled that his correct course was to have hired a taxi and charged it up to his employer. The minutes on the subject make sad reading. Still, I suppose every

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club has some dark spot in its history. The entirely stainless escutcheon does not exist.

Despite their financial difficulties, the number of clubs (of one sort or another) existing in London is really remarkable. As a matter of fact, nobody need be club-less. There is a comfortable niche prepared for him somewhere. Thus (and in addition to the caravanserais that cater for diplomatists, naval and military men, politicians and scientists, etc.), there are separate clubs for actors and auctioneers, for ballet-girls and brewers, for cat fanciers and conjurers, for domestics and dramatists, for financiers and flautists, for misogynists and mountaineers, for poets and profiteers, for stenographers and strumpets, for taxi-drivers and theologians, and for waiters and widowers, etc. Consequently, if anyone is left out in the cold, it is entirely his own fault. There is certainly a club for him somewhere.

2.

It is perhaps the artistic and literary worlds of London that are best catered for by coteries of the existence of which the average individual knows least. The majority of them, however, are merely dining clubs, or else simply societies. Still, they fulfil a useful purpose, since they give members a chance of meeting interesting people as well as freaks. I have belonged to several (including the Times Book Club), and visited most of the others. Among the best known perhaps are (in alphabetical

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order) the following: After Dinner, Dilettanti, Gypsy, Hambone, Odde Volumes, Omar Khayyam, P. E. N., Studio, To-Morrow, and Whitefriars. There is even a "Pure Literature Society." If I can find an acceptable proposer and seconder, I must think about joining this. The receipt by the committee of a copy of this volume ought to help my candidature.

Of course, some of these organizations may have vanished by this time, for they have a habit of springing up in the night like Jonah's gourd and then withering in a week or so. The direct cause of their disappearance is often a difficulty with the police over the licensing regulations. A club is one thing, and a pub is another, and the attempt to combine the two (which is what generally happens) is only asking for trouble. The Orange Tree (where I have seen Arthur Symons looking rather like a fish out of water, and obviously wondering what the devil he could be doing in such an esoteric atmosphere), certainly had a short life, and not a particularly merry one. Even the dashing experiment of grafting on to it the culture of the To-Morrow Club failed to cure the dry rot that had already set in when the blend was effected. I fancy, however, that the oddly named Hambone is still flourishing. This is a curious joint (where Augustus John looms large amid a sprinkling of Cubists and Vorticists), and is a fairly successful effort to introduce pseudo-cabaret life within the four mile radius. The premises, as a matter of fact, front the stage door

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of the Lyric, and are much frequented by the smart-set of the Regent Palace Hotel.

A personality that loomed large over the somewhat eclectic atmosphere of the Hambone at the start was that of "Badger" Moody. This was a one-armed artist, of a distinctly Bohemian nature. Like all such people, he was full of money one day, and absolutely devoid of it the next. But it seemed to make no difference to him. A thoroughly good-hearted fellow, I think he would willingly have shared his last halfpenny—or borrowed one from somebody else—with a friend. A story illustrative of his happy freedom from the trammels of conventionality, is told of him to the effect that, on a certain occasion, and when he was more than usually hard up, he invited a friend to have a drink with him. Fancying he was "flush" at the moment (although he only had a few coppers in the world), the other accepted the proffered hospitality. Thereupon "Badger" ordered one lager and two glasses, into which he equally divided the measure. "Badger," who had the supremest contempt for what other people chose to think of him, was not in the least upset by the waiter's horror, and would probably have done precisely the same thing at the Carlton.

A good musician, as well—so far as his physical incapacity permitted it—as a fair artist, the sympathies of "Badger" Moody were all with artists and musicians, and, after his death (which occurred at an early age), a concert was held to promote a fund for their benefit. As generally happens, however, on

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such occasions, it was not over well supported, and numbers of individuals in search of free advertisement put their names down to contribute, and then had a bad attack of memory failure.

A little-known coterie of a distinctly literary nature is the To-Morrow Club. It is not nearly as advanced as it sounds. Nor is it particularly high-brow, the principal reason being that its members are all of them much too hard working for anything of the sort. This membership is composed for the most part of artists, authors, journalists and novelists, plus a sprinkling of actors, dramatists and poets, etc., with clever people like Mrs. Dawson Scott, Miss Sheila Kaye-Smith and J. D. Beresford on the committee. The club's idea—or *raison d'être*, as reporters say when writing about it—is to hold fortnightly meetings, when somebody of repute (alleged, or otherwise) delivers a paper, followed by a discussion. Plain speaking is apt to mark these discussions. I remember being bitterly assailed myself when I was daring enough to address one of these gatherings on "Awful Autobiographies," or "Murky Memoirs," or something of the sort. Personally, I didn't mind in the least, and played for it deliberately, as I always like to see discord in debate. It wakes things up.

Some people, however, take themselves very seriously on such occasions. Thus, an eminent publisher who held forth to the Club on "Bolshevism Among Authors" (or something that certainly sounded like it), was immensely hurt when one of the hot bloods present told him candidly that he ought to be picking

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oakum. Apparently, the story of his somewhat unceremonious reception spread abroad, for the next expert invited to address a meeting carefully stipulated that he should not be "heckled."

The beginnings of the To-Morrow Club seem to have been laid in mystery. J. D. Beresford, however, tells me they were laid in a fried-fish shop. As he is one of the original members, he ought to know. All the same, another authority is positive that the fish were not fried, but merely stuffed. This circumstance rather suggests that the early gatherings took place on the borrowed premises of an anglers' club; and somebody else who was there, assures me that the habitat was Southampton Row.

When I first knew the To-Morrow Club it met in a long tunnel-shaped room in Long Acre. The electric lighting arrangements were a bit defective, and I have a distinct recollection of dropping in one wet night and hearing W. L. George discoursing on "Wicked Women"—or some equally thrilling subject—into inky darkness. With the gradual growth of membership, the committee—greatly daring—moved to Caxton Hall for their assemblies. Visiting this place was rather an adventure, as, misled by the maze of corridors, one was apt to wander into the wrong room and be regaled with the perfervid oratory of, say, an anti-vaccinationist—or a vegetarian, or a woman's franchise devotee—instead of that of the individual on the official programme. Thus, I once spent nearly fifteen minutes hearing, I think, Eustace Miles uttering bright thoughts about proteids,

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under the impression that I was really listening to Gilbert Frankau on modern novelists, as per schedule. But this sort of thing merely lent an added zest to the proceedings.

Nowadays, I understand that the To-Morrow Club, under the presidency of Miss Sheila Kaye-Smith, is flourishing to such an extent that it has one set of premises in Soho and another in Oxford Street.

3.

At some of the literary dining clubs there is a curious habit of starting the evening's proceedings by publicly announcing the names of the guests. For people of modest nature (like myself) this practice is just a little embarrassing, as ordinary politeness requires the *bona fide* members to greet the recital with applause. What happens is that the secretary gets up and proclaims that "Mr. Wiggins brings Mr. Figgins (vociferous cheers) ; Mr. Buggins brings Mr. Huggins (loud cheers) ; Mr. Juggins brings Mr. Muggins (diminished cheers) ;" and so on, until by the time he gets down to the X's, Y's, and Z's, there is nothing more than a little perfunctory rapping on the table. As these are all exclusive organizations, I need scarcely say that I am not a member. Still, I have sometimes been privileged to attend as the guest of somebody who has duly passed the ballot. On these occasions, I always feel glad that I come in near the top of the list in alphabetical order. The result is, I can count on a much heartier greeting than

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I merit. If my name began with, say, a W, I don't think I could really bring myself to attend these functions, pleasant as they are.

People talk vaguely of the *cachet* attaching to membership of a London club. Where however, 90 per cent of them are concerned, there is nowadays no *cachet* at all. With the exception of Arthur's, Brooks's, the Travellers' and the St. James's—and perhaps half a dozen others at the outside—membership of any of them is precious little more than a matter of being proposed and seconded, and having one's cheque for entrance fee and subscription well and truly cashed. The fact is, in these difficult days clubs cannot afford to be exclusive, and simply have to admit multitudes of people at whom, and only a very few years ago, they would have turned up their noses in disdain.

Of course, here and there, candidates still get black-balled. But it occurs very rarely nowadays, and then only in the half dozen clubs or so where there really does happen to be a genuine waiting-list. Black-balling is indulged in for all sorts of reasons, and generally on account of private spite and malice. Thackeray himself was refused the first time he put up for the Athenæum, and I know quite a prominent actor who failed to pass muster at the Garrick. In this case the grounds given for not admitting him was that he "habitually used bad language." As I have heard some of it, I think the committee were justified.

Then there was a somewhat remarkable instance at

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the Travellers'. A certain individual, who was on the candidates' list, appeared to possess every qualification for membership. Thus, he was the bearer of a distinguished name, had a very good public record, and finally was proposed and seconded by influential people. Yet, when the ballot-boxes were opened they were found to contain an almost unprecedented number of black balls. Thereupon his astonished supporters instituted enquiries. The story then came out that what was against him in the eyes of the other members was that, as a boy, he had been punished at Eton for cruelty to dormice. More than forty years had passed since then, but the incident had not been forgotten.

I think the star blackballing story is one that Sir Algernon West told me as having occurred at Brooks's. A very undesirable candidate's name had been submitted, and—the election there being by the committee—each individual member put in a black ball as a matter of course. Yet, and although there were only twelve members voting, the ballot box was found to contain thirteen balls of this sinister hue. The apparent mystery, however, had a simple enough solution. A trusted coffee-room waiter of many years' service, who happened to know something about the candidate, admitted that he had—and in the interests of the club—surreptitiously dropped in a black ball himself.

By the way, if people think it worth their while to write and tell me that Fitzroy Gardner gives this identical story in his admirable volume of memoirs,

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they may spare themselves the trouble. The fact is, I have already had the pleasure of reading it there myself.

4.

I seem to have belonged, at one time or another, to a considerable number of clubs. They were all quite third rate, except one which was quite second rate. Still, each of them would probably be immensely annoyed at the idea of being graded as anything but first rate. The best of the batch had its house in St. James's Street. Although it gave itself tremendous airs, it was merely full of wealthy Piccadilly tradesmen. As a matter of fact, very few other people could afford to pay the preposterous entrance-fee and high annual subscription demanded. Leviathans in the pills and soap industry sat on the committee, and contributed largely to the "whips" that were always being got up by the harassed secretary to keep the place going. When I got tired of receiving continual S.O.S. appeals, I withdrew and joined another establishment in the same district. It was fully as second rate. Yet, it had, in my eyes, one attractive point. This was that when it closed every August for cleaning, the dispossessed members were temporarily turned over to the Reform.

This business of "club exchanges" sometimes has curious consequences. One is that a reprehensible practice, almost amounting to body-snatching, is apt to be indulged in at such times and committees and secretaries poach shamefully on each other's preserves. Thus, when a small club to which I once

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belonged was temporarily closed, we "visited" another in Piccadilly. The first morning I went there an affable stranger began to talk to me. Taking him for one of our hosts, and wishing to ingratiate myself with him, I remarked how much superior this establishment was to my own.

"Glad you think so," he said briskly. "You must join us. I'm the secretary. Chuck your other club and come here. I'll find you a proposer and seconder all right."

I don't know what my own committee would have said to this, but I doubt if they would have been too pleased.

Much the same experience befell me at a second club which I visited under similar circumstances. This time it was one in Pall Mall. As before, a stranger, whom I took to be a member, inquired my opinion of the place. When I said guardedly that it "seemed all right," he shook me warmly by the hand.

"Then just sign this," he returned, producing a document from his pocket. "It's an application form. The proposer and seconder can be filled in afterwards."

When I told him I would "think it over," he looked quite upset.

"That's what all you people say," he murmured sadly.

5.

During the last few years an immense change has

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come over clubland. The old spirit of dignity and decorum has gone, and been succeeded by an ungraceful one of hustle and bustle. Half the newcomers seem to be run by "syndicates" on the lines of combined restaurants and hotels, with jazz bands braying in the entrance halls, and are practically open to the public. The hall-porters don't know the names of the members, and don't even pretend to. But nothing else could fairly be expected of them, when the membership lists reach, as they do, totals of five thousand and even more. The consequence is, at some of these curious establishments page boys in buttons saunter through the vast rooms at intervals lustily bellowing names. Of one such caravanserai the story is told that when the cognomen of Mr. Mosenstein—or something equally typical—is shouted in the echoing halls, a dozen podgy hands shoot up and husky voices demand, "Here, boy, vat initial?"

I always think that the best value for money I ever had out of a club was in the case of an unpretentious one of the "pot-house" variety, with premises in the hinterland of Piccadilly. As this was named after a certain flower of the field, I will call it the Cowslip Club. Membership was nominally restricted to "noblemen and gentlemen supporting the Conservative cause." The committee, however, were not unduly eclectic. Any way, when, out of sheer idle curiosity, I called in there one day and inquired for somebody (who did not happen to belong to it), the hall-porter affably invited me to "look round for myself." As the place seemed cheap and comfor-

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table, I told the good fellow, when leaving, that I would like to have a word with the secretary.

"If it's about joining, sir," he said briskly, "you can pay me the subscription now, and a receipt will be sent by post. It will be quite all right."

And it was "quite all right," too. No ridiculous airs and graces, and no irritating delays and formalities about joining the Cowslip Club. It is true that, like its better-known rivals, it had a "waiting list." This, however, only meant that if a candidate applied in the morning (before the secretary had finished his breakfast), he would have to wait until the afternoon to have his election completed. One of its other solid advantages was that it certainly had a good address. The result was that the scores of young actors and journalists belonging to it (for, despite the high promise of the prospectus, the membership was not entirely composed of "noblemen and gentlemen supporting the ——" etc.), used to print on their visiting cards and private notepaper, "Number —, Curzon Street, Mayfair."

And very sensible of them, too.

The Cowslip never pretended to be the Carlton. Still, it occupied a distinct niche. Anyway, once when a member was arrested for being drunk and disorderly, he was described in an evening paper as a "West End Clubman." As the committee very properly remarked, this should have silenced for ever any question as to its status.

It is a long time since I have been inside the Cowslip. The fact is, its fame spread to such an extent

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that the place rather resembled a public library (with the additional attraction of a bar on the premises), and something very like strap-hanging was necessary in order to get near enough a table to sit down and write a letter, or near enough a chair to sit down and read a paper. Accordingly, I withdrew when my first year's subscription ran out, despite pathetic remonstrances from the genial secretary, whose income was derived from a small capitation fee on members.

Nowadays I have practically given up clubs. They don't seem to exercise any appeal to my special requirements. After all, I find the Times Book Club suits me well enough. Anyway, when I happen to want a little quiet amusement, I can always drop in there and enjoy the whimsical spectacle of leading authors asking for their own books.

CHAPTER XIX

READERS AND WRITERS

Dearth of Literary Papers—Stemming the Gap—Pluralists on the Press
—Reviewers and Reviewing—"Snippets" Journals—Peers and
their Pens.

THE correct etiquette governing members' conduct at some of the smaller literary clubs to which I referred in the last chapter is full of pitfalls for the unwary. Thus, at one to which I belonged a committee meeting was hastily convened after a dinner and a special rule passed that "no member or guest should make a gathering an opportunity of soliciting or offering business." Since this struck me as a somewhat curiously worded rule, I inquired into the cause. In reply, I learned that complaints had been received that a publisher, who had attended as a guest, had asked certain members for books. I could not, however, discover if the complaints had emanated from members who had been asked for work, or from members who had not been asked. I, by the way, was among the latter. Yet, when I voiced a complaint on the subject, I got no sympathy. It seemed a little one-sided.

Although there is now no really literary paper in England, a vast number of people still appear to be engaged in ambling round literature in the dailies and

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weeklies, plus, of course, the monthlies and quarterlies. "Book Gossip" and "Criticism" (of sorts) is to be met with everywhere, not omitting the evening journals. In these latter, however, the feature is sandwiched in between reports of football matches, race meetings, dog fights, and women's fashions.

Carmelite House, which seldom misses an opportunity of launching a new paper (and seldom launches a new paper without missing an opportunity) has naturally enough experimented in this restricted market. Years ago (fired by the exemplar of its elder brother in Printing House Square, which was then issuing *Literature* every Saturday morning under the ægis of H. D. Traill) the *Daily Mail* was provided with a "Literary Supplement" all to itself. It was quite a good one, too. The first editor was Edmund Gosse (a circumstance on which is hung a famous story, but one much too old to repeat), and the second was Archibald Marshall. I fancy Marshall, who is now a novelist of repute, was also the last, for the bantling soon withered and drooped in the hustling atmosphere of Carmelite House, and was shut down summarily when it ceased to "pay." A proper enough decision, for the Northcliffe Press owes a duty to its thousands of shareholders, and it is no part of this duty to bolster up unremunerative propositions. I am a shareholder myself, so I speak feelingly. Yet, I was sorry the "supplement" disappeared, for, when Gosse was at the helm, I made a welcome addition to my scanty earnings by writing in it regularly.

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Apart from his considerable literary attainments, Edmund Gosse (whose "Father and Son" is the best autobiography I know) is distinguished for his urbanity. I never saw him in my life, but I have had some correspondence with him on business matters. There might have been more of this, but for the unfortunate fact that while he writes exceedingly brilliantly, he also writes a hand that is extraordinarily illegible.

"Who is this fellow, E. Goose?" the recipient of a letter from him once despairingly asked me, "and what on earth does he say? I can't make out whether it is 'your book is excellent,' or 'your book is drivél.' "

As Gosse is the soul of courtesy and kindness in his criticisms, I fancy it must have been the former.

Literature, as conducted by H. D. Traill, was much the best organ of its class with which I am familiar. The chief point in its favour was that it was not under the thumb of any individual publishing house, but was absolutely independent. Traill had just the requisite touch for the job; and, under his régime, the paper avoided the stodginess, pseudo-scholarship, would-be smartness, vulgarity, ignorance, and (as often as not) sheer dishonesty of its competitors. It certainly ought to have filled a gap. But it did not do so, and accordingly died the death. It is all very well to protest that *Literature* is "incorporated" with the *Times Literature Supplement*. This is not the same thing at all. Indeed, it might just as well be argued (and probably is by the proprietors) that, although it is now wrapped up in the

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Nation, the *Athenæum* still exists as a separate entity. It does nothing of the sort. Similarly, the circumstance that the title-page of a comic weekly bears the superscription "with which is incorporated the *Academy*" does not get over the hard fact that the *Academy* is as dead as mutton. I could never decide whether its untimely decease was due to too much Douglas and Crosland, or not enough of them.

A good deal of money was put into the *Academy* coffers towards its latter days—the backers being said to include Lord Howard de Walden and Sir Edward Tennant—but nobody seems to know just where the bullion went. Certainly it was not dissipated on the contributors. I can go bail for that. When there happened to be any cash not otherwise hypothecated, I generally—by dint of gentle, but firm persistence—got at least part of what was due to me; and when there wasn't any, I merely got peevish letters. Still, I bear no malice, as the weekly privilege of reading Douglas's sonnets and Crosland's pungent paragraphs was quite a good return for the columns I laboriously filled with my jejune opinions.

So far as go the few monthlies nominally devoted to literary matters, there is nothing in England nearly as good as the *Dial* and the *Bookman* of New York. Against these, we have two or three camouflaged trade organs, which merely exist to puff the volumes issued by their own firms. The weeklies are a bit better, since they are not quite so much under the thumb of any particular publisher; and one occasionally lights upon a little intelligent criticism in the *Spectator*,

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and a refreshingly considerable amount in the *Nation* and the *Sunday Times*. The marvel, however—when one considers the circumstances governing it as a whole—is not that the general standard of book reviewing is so bad, but that it is not very much worse.

Everybody seems desperately anxious to be a book reviewer; and editors get more applications to “do the books” than even to be dramatic critics. It is remarkable that this should be so, for the work is shockingly ill-paid, very uninteresting (taking it all round), and means a lot of sheer drudgery. It is probably because it is so ill-paid (the average newspaper rates varying from three guineas a column to nothing at all, “and send back the book”) that half the reviewers are pluralists. There is really nothing else for them to do if they are to make anything of a living out of the job.

Yet, the pluralist system is none the less highly improper. What it amounts to is that the same man will review the same book in several different papers. He can then do one of two things. His choice lies between declaring in each of them that it is good, or bad; or, praising it in some, and blaming it in others. In either case his action is distinctly fraudulent. This is because the ignorant and trusting public, whom he affects to guide, naïvely say to themselves “this must be a good (or a bad) book, since it is praised (or blamed) in six different papers.” The poor innocents imagine (and are permitted and encouraged to imagine) that what they are getting are the opinions of six separate experts, whereas what

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they are really getting is one opinion expressed six times by the same person. If this is not a fraud on the public, dictionary definitions must be recast.

It is probably because (except in a few rare instances) book-reviewing is so ill-paid that it is generally done so incompetently. While the average editor takes a lot of care in sending a trustworthy person to report a dog fight, his opinion on current literature would seem to be that books are of so little account that it really doesn't matter a row of pins what is said about them or who says it. If there is a "system" on which reviewers are appointed (and I suppose there is), I have yet to discover it. Still, I have made some quaint discoveries in the course of my investigations. Thus, the other afternoon I happened upon a young woman who "does the books" for a certain "literary" (alleged) weekly.

"I've been frightfully busy," she said. "Just think, it's five o'clock now, and I've reviewed nine novels since half-past three."

I did think.

"Nine novels in an hour and a half," I observed. "That's one every ten minutes."

"Yes," was the reply, "but I'd have knocked them off quicker, only I was having my tea at the same time."

So that is how books get "reviewed," I thought, or, rather, "knocked off," to use the expert's own happily chosen term. An author spends six months (at least) in writing something in blood and tears and sweat, and a young woman pronounces critical

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judgment (or what passes for it) upon his work in ten minutes. Well, the only consolation is that this sort of "review" has no real effect, one way or the other.

I read, or at any rate glance at, all sorts of papers—from *Answers* to the *Quarterly*. In a recent article by C. E. Lawrence, which appeared in the latter, I find this well-put pronouncement: "No book by an accepted author can be so bad but somebody with a pen and the opportunity will range it with perfection, allowing it to blaze for a moment in company with the mightiest before it falls to oblivion."

This is bitter. Still, there is a considerable amount of solid truth behind it. "Accepted authors" often write very bad books indeed—much worse than those of their colleagues who do not happen to be "accepted"—but the reviewers seldom give them the raps over the knuckles they merit. Just because the new volume of Buggins—or Huggins—or Juggins—or whoever is the "accepted author" of the moment—is being dealt with, it is regarded as almost sacrosanct, and positive pæans are sounded. When the book falls flat (as a carelessly composed and ill-written one is certain to do) all that the professional literary guides can do is to scold the public. They would be much more profitably occupied in admonishing Messrs. Buggins and Huggins and Juggins to mend their wicked ways and do better work in future.

The favourite word in the restricted vocabulary of the average literary critic appears to be "great." One sees the term applied on a wholesale scale.

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Apropos—journalists love this expression (that is why I use it)—I was looking the other day at the “literary page” of a certain weekly organ. It was devoted to three nonentities (each with photographs complete) labelled respectively a “great editor,” a “great publisher,” and a (I’m not sure it wasn’t *the*) “great humorist.” The “great editor” was further described as a “pro-consul of journalism”—does the illiterate fellow who wrote this phrase happen by any chance to know what a pro-consul is?—when he was merely the conductor of a third-rate daily with a fourth-rate circulation; the “great publisher” was certainly a man who had made a lot of money, but he had made it out of the brains of other people, not his own; while the “great humorist” was a singularly dull-witted individual, whose ideas of humour—judging from his furtively published specimens of it—came out of the Ark, and ought to have stopped there. Thus the triumvirate. Good citizens and worthy fathers, doubtless. Also, good average workmen. Still, not quite the bearers of names to go ringing down the ages. Any way, not very loudly.

Of all the host who write about books and their authors—in the dailies and weeklies and monthlies and quarterlies—the one who does so best is, I fancy, Clement Shorter. At any rate, he is always interesting, and generally remarkably well informed as well. The result is that—apart from his curious obsession (due probably more to kindness of heart than anything else) that certain second-rate novelists are in the first flight—his weekly page in the *Sphere* is far

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and away the most readable thing of the sort that is being published. The reason is simple. "C. K. S." knows his own mind, and does not hesitate to express it. Pretentious humbugs and empty (but resounding) windbags—the "great" authors of Messrs. Bilge, Boom, Bounce, and Co.—are put in their proper place by him. They don't like it, and walk about complaining bitterly that Shorter has "no manners." He has a command of good English, which I prefer. It is, however, a severe shock to me to find him, on his own page in a recent issue, using the dreadful word "exam." Still, I will be charitable, and presume that it slipped in by accident.

This is an age of "Snippets" journals, a veritable host of which have rudely jostled aside their betters in fierce competition for the public's pence (now, by the way, a minimum of twopence). They are all run on much the same lines; and, as they are quite good lines of their sort, the majority of them are deservedly successful. The result is, they have enabled their astute founders to amass supertaxable fortunes, and (in most cases) to wear the ermine as well. *Tit Bits*, the father of them all, and from which Galloway Frazer (another Scotsman) has just retired, still flourishes vigorously. As a matter of fact, its present position is probably stronger than ever owing to the recent coalition between the Montagues and Capulets, or, rather, the houses of Newnes and Pearson. Lord Riddell (the inevitable Scotsman again!) is reported to read every line of it, and to be full of helpful suggestions for improvement and

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plans for making two copies circulate where only one copy circulated before. Since he became a director of Newnes he writes as regularly in the firm's various publications (*John o' London's* seems to be his favourite) as any three-pounds-a-week journalist.

But when the proprietors join the ranks of the nobility (or when the nobility join the ranks of the proprietors) it is quite the accepted thing for them to use their pens. Thus, the shining example set long ago by Lord Northcliffe has since been assiduously followed by Lord Rothermere and by Lord Beaverbrook. I am not so certain about Lord Dalziel. Apart from this possible exception, Sir Edward Hulton seems to be almost the only newspaper magnate with a handle to his name who does not spread his own light and learning in the journals he controls. But then, so far, he has not yet even achieved what the peerage experts unkindly (albeit correctly) dub "an inferior order of territorial nobility." When, however, the coronet with six (and in some cases, sixteen) balls complete—as worn in Carmelite Street and the Strand, etc.—comes along, this reproach will doubtless be removed from the *Daily Sketch* and *Evening Standard*, etc. In the meantime, Dean Inge seems to be a Shoe Lane star. This is a lot better than being a shooting one.

If the reading public "loves a lord," it loves a lady quite as much. Carmelite House appears to get most of this Debrett and Burke feminine output. Still, if Lady Angela Forbes and Lady Susan Townley (whom, by the way, I saw referred to in the *Even-*

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ing News the other day as Lady Townley) and Lady Frances Balfour (plus an occasional duchess) provide pabulum in the *Weekly Dispatch* on Sundays, Lady Kitty Vincent turns out a bright column in the *London Mail* on Saturdays.

Honours are easy.

CHAPTER XX

MURKY MEMOIRS

Autobiographies and their Authors—Three Authors to One Book—Literary “Ghosting”—Two Cardinal Errors—Senility and Snobbery—Murky Memoirs—“Lottie Collins of Literature”—Faulty Definitions—Word of Warning.

1.

THIS is the last chapter (“Loud and prolonged Applause!” as they say at City banquets). In order to write those preceding it, I trained to a certain extent. Time wasted? Very possibly (I have not yet seen my royalty accounts), but I merely mention the matter to show that I did take some sort of trouble. Lots of people, however, when writing such books, take no sort of trouble at all. Indeed—and if only half one hears whispered in the Grub Street *ateliers* is true—some of the illustrious individuals whose names appear on the title pages of volumes of reminiscences, memoirs, and autobiography, etc., do not even write them. As it happens, it is unnecessary, since there is always readily available a large supply of diligent and accomplished hacks who do this sort of thing very well, and give, all things considered, quite good value in return for the extremely modest rate of payment they charge. The “author”

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gets the fame, and the actual compiler gets the cash. A fair division.

Apropos, I met one of these merchants the other afternoon and inquired as to his prospects.

"Doing immense!" he declared. "I've just written Lady Blogg's 'reminiscences' for her, and now I've got a City knight in tow."

By the way, one such recent work was written by no less than three people. What happened was that the "author"—this time an ambitious lady—started operations by engaging an industrious pressman to string together 20,000 words, "from material supplied," as the advertisement put it. When the accommodating scribe had done his work, he demanded to be paid. Thereupon, the fair "author" got peevish, and sacked the daring fellow. A second expert was then secured. The same untoward episode broke down the *entente*, as also with the third assistant. Still, as by this time the triumvirate had completed a solid slab of 60,000 words between them, there was enough in hand to constitute a fairly substantial volume. The odd thing is, the resulting hotch-potch was really quite successful and sold remarkably well. In fact, I have just seen it advertised as "fifth thousand." At a guinea a copy, this means money.

2.

It is curious how these "Giant's Robe" stories get about. If I have heard of one book written by somebody other than the person whose name is set forth

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on the title page, I have heard of a dozen. There is a certain amount of "ghosting"—as it is technically termed—I admit, but not nearly so much as people imagine. The reason is simple, and should occur readily to anyone capable of thinking. This is that if a man can write a book for another person, he can perfectly well write one for himself. In these cases, he generally does so. What, however, does sometimes occur—especially in the compilation of "memoirs," etc.—is that a man (or woman) may have acquired a mass of first-class material, and be unable (from want of experience) to put it together in acceptable form. In such instances he (or she) employs a practised hand to lick it into shape, as it were. Of course, this is a fraud on the public, who get Fleet Street when they pay for Mayfair. Still, it is a very minor fraud, and no particular harm is done.

I have been responsible for a bit of "ghosting" myself. It happened that I once met a certain general who was desperately desirous of being enrolled in the ranks of authorship, and was prepared to pay (moderately) any one who could pilot him there. Like most generals, this one was a mixture of stupidity and vanity, and possessed of the literary equipment of an errand boy. However—and as he made it worth my while—I took him and his stuff in hand, and by dint of re-writing every word of the latter, eventually turned out a substantial-looking volume of "Recollections," the title page of which blazoned with his own name. Very much to my surprise—but not at all to his (so vast was his vanity)—

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I, and although this was not in the bond, even found a publisher. In due time the book made its appearance; the illustrious warrior was regarded as a Hall Caine by his admiring friends, and I pocketed a hundred and fifty guineas.

I must here have builded better than I knew, for, oddly enough, the volume had a certain measure of success. Anyway, the enterprising publisher—who knew nothing whatever about my connection with it (and, very wisely, would not have cared a rap if he had)—commissioned a sequel. When the proud “author” approached me, I put up my terms. In fact, I doubled them. Although the gallant veteran demurred a bit at what he called my “graspingness,” the bait of literary distinction (or what passed for it in his circles) was so alluring to him that he eventually agreed. When he had paid a hundred guineas on account I—of course, I mean, he—got to work and wrote the book. I forget what it was about this time, but what I do remember is that I never got another halfpenny from my employer. Perhaps he repented of his bargain. All I know is that as soon as I delivered the final chapter, he left England on a prolonged voyage. During his absence he wrote to me from various out-of-the-way parts of the world, declaring that the more he read the book the more he liked it. Unfortunately for me, however, he never seemed to like it quite well enough to send me a cheque for the balance.

After this experience I formed the, perhaps wise, decision to get cash down in similar circumstances.

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However, so far as I am concerned, there never have been any similar circumstances.

3.

I said just now that I "trained" for this book. I did so. My training took the practical form of going through an intensive course of reading nothing but reminiscences, memoirs, and autobiographies for six months on end. During this period I must have read dozens. Anyway, the supply was there. The fact is, all sorts of people seem to be delivering themselves (with the aid of professional accoucheurs or otherwise) of such books nowadays. Consider the list for a moment. It is really extraordinarily comprehensive. Thus we have peers and profiteers, artists and authors, actors and dramatists, editors and journalists, prizefighters and cinema stars, politicians and the wives of Cabinet Ministers, and soldiers and sailors and candlestick-makers generally. All these industrious people mean well, no doubt, but the majority of their efforts in this field impress me as being marred by two cardinal and characteristic errors.

The first of these errors is, as I said in Chapter I, that the average individual puts off writing his (or her) reminiscences until he (or again, she) is a great deal too old. The natural result is, all the first fine careless rapture and sparkle have gone out of the incidents described, and what is left is merely something that is flat and stale and generally

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unprofitable. Such authors, too, usually confine themselves to delving almost entirely in the musty records of the past. Thus, the latest novel of which they appear to have heard is "Trilby"; Aubrey Beardsley stands for everything that is "decadent" in art; and the "Gay Lord Quex" is the (to them) absolutely last word in "daringness," to which even leading dramatists will descend. The very wheels of the writers' tired memories can be heard creaking. An unpleasant sound.

Personally I am inclined to think that the proper age at which to compile one's reminiscences is somewhere well under thirty at the outside. Anybody who had lived in London for this length of time (and kept his eyes and ears fairly well open) has certainly had the opportunity of acquiring plenty of material about which to write something really interesting. Whether he has also acquired the capacity for expressing it is, of course, another matter. Still, I am glad to note that this pet theory of mine (*Memoirs by the Young*) is beginning to meet with some sort of acceptance; and that the hot and hectic blood of, at any rate, comparative youth is throwing down the gauntlet to its seniors and beginning to inform some of the more recent autobiographical volumes that have appeared. In America, where things seem to move a bit faster, I understand that little girls of ten and eleven are now busily engaged in writing their "reminiscences." And, what is more, they are getting them published.

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Where this country is concerned, the first—and by far the best—of these volumes written by an author not in his or her dotage was Shane Leslie's "End of a Chapter." Gerald Cumberland, Hesketh Pearson, and Stephen McKenna have tilled the same field much more recently. The principal drawback to the output of the two former is (and apart from their excess of malice) that they deal merely with people who have already been "written up" far too much. Still, I suppose it is very difficult to produce a book of reminiscences without doing so. Certainly, I don't seem to have been able to avoid this pitfall myself.

But by far the more conspicuous error of the average autobiography or similar work is its dreadful snobbishness. Thus the indices read like so many extracts from Burke and Debrett (when Burke and Hare would be much more interesting), and the whole aim of these sycophantic scribes seems to be merely to impress their deluded readers with the idea that they have dined with this person, or stayed in a country house with that one. Half of them, too, write like footmen or upper housemaids. It is all very well for them to declare in portentous prefaces that the gossip they so assiduously dish up was gathered at afternoon tea tables. Very probably it was, but it was clearly while the chroniclers were carrying the tea trays. In one such recently published volume I have actually encountered references to "Lady Alfred Butt," and to "Lady Arthur Conan Doyle" and "Lady Doyle"

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on the same page. Such lapses are inexcusable. Nearly every Society paper has a very sound etiquette column; and Whitaker, too, which has a perfectly reliable "Mode of Addresses" feature, can always be borrowed from somebody.

4.

I have seen it somewhere laid down by an expert that "vanity, and the capacity to express it, are the principal ingredients of a successful autobiography." This is so obvious a truth that the average purblind readers of such works do not appear to have perceived it for themselves. The reason of its truth is that if one has no vanity, one has practically nothing to say; and if one has no capacity for expression, what one says is of no sort of account—either in an autobiography or in anything else.

It is regrettable—but none the less equally true—that an autobiography or book of reminiscences has very little general interest (and certainly fails to make any large appeal) if it is not at any rate tinged with malice or plain speaking and a certain perceptible amount of sheer bad taste. Otherwise—and poor weak human nature being what it is—such a volume too often resolves itself merely into so much gas and gush about nothing of any real interest or value. Shrieks of virtuous indignation greeted the appearance in print of the murky memoirs of Lady Cardigan, and Mrs. Asquith, and (more recently) Lady Angela Forbes. As a matter

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of fact, however, these three books were (and of their restricted class) quite excellent and almost model autobiographies. They were written by people who had minds to express, and who expressed them; who had something definite (if debatable) to say, and who said it. It is all a matter of taste (or perhaps the want of it), but of the trio I think Mrs. Asquith's much-assailed volume is the best. Despite its vulgarity and malice and errors of judgment—even more marked than my own in these chapters—it is sincere and candid, and is thus valuable as a picture of the writer's individual *milieu*, instead of being the emasculated dope and bunkum unblushingly served out by the self-complacent and egregious Bok and the average author of reminiscences. Stern critics have dubbed Mrs. Asquith the "Lottie Collins of Literature." Well, I hope Miss Collins has sisters.

By the way, there is a suggestion assiduously put forward by the know-alls and hangers-on of "literary" circles in the remoter suburbs that Mrs. Asquith's book was really written by Edmund Gosse. I fancy Edmund Gosse did have something to do with it, but he certainly did not write a line of it.

The gossips and paragraphists must try again.

5.

I do not know that there is any great difference between an autobiography and a book of reminiscences. My dictionary, however, defines the former

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as "the exact life of a person written by himself," and the latter as "an accurate account of what has happened." I am not altogether prepared to accept these definitions. They strike me as being a bit too optimistic and trusting. As it happens, an autobiography is very seldom the "exact life" of any one. It is far more often merely that portion of the subject's life in which he wishes to impress his readers favourably—to make them metaphorically slap him on the back and say what a devilish fine fellow he is.

Then take reminiscences and their dictionary definition, viz., "an accurate account of what has happened." Well, I have read a considerable number of such volumes, and the very distinct impression they leave on my mind is that they are largely made up of entirely imaginary happenings. With "memoirs" this seems to be even still more the case, and the authors—especially if they are contributing them to Sunday papers—then apparently feel that they can say without let or hindrance just whatever they like about their unfortunate friends and acquaintances. Anyway, all the star actions for libel seem to be brought against people who write autobiographies; while reminiscences and memoirs are, generally speaking, regarded as so utterly irresponsible that nobody troubles to take any serious notice of them.

By the way, these "Notes About Nobodies" should be classed as "memoirs."

And now for my absolutely last word.

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In compiling a volume such as this, dealing with quite ordinary people, things are bound to have slipped in here and there that would doubtless have been better omitted. Still, when I remember what I have written and contrast it with what I might have written, upon my word, I feel like Clive—"astonished at my moderation!"

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